CTESIAS' *PERSICA* and Its Near Eastern Context

MATT WATERS

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To
my teachers

In memory of
Dr. Erle Verdun Leichty
1933–2016

Dr. Clyde Curry Smith
1929–2016

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Preface

Ctesias' *Persica* is, directly or indirectly, a main source for many of our perceptions of Achaemenid Persian history and culture. Like most Greek writers who coded their writings for their Greek audiences, Ctesias presented skewed views of the Persian court and nobility. Breaking these codes has occupied many scholars over the last generation. The study of Ctesias' works has been undergoing a renaissance of late, spurred by the translations and commentaries of D. Lenfant (2004), G. Nichols (2008, 2011), L. Llewellyn-Jones and J. Robson (2010), and J. Stronk (2010), along with numerous specialized studies, prominent among them the contributions to the 2011 volume edited by J. Wiesehöfer, R. Rollinger, and G. Lanfranchi. Lenfant 2004 and Stronk 2010 contain both the Greek text of the *Persica* and a translation, and are considered the current standard editions. Those books and my own contribution owe much to the foundational studies of F. Jacoby (1922, 1958) and J. Bigwood (1964), among many others that will be cited throughout this work.

This book was long in the making, often subordinated to other projects or responsibilities. I hope it will serve as an impetus for further explorations into how Ctesias adapted Near Eastern material for his Greek milieu and how his *Persica* impacted subsequent literature. The project's genesis lay in a planned translation of the text with a traditional historical commentary, but others (listed above) ably beat me to it. Vestiges of the original purpose remain, but ongoing research into the *Persica* led to several Near Eastern elements that warranted additional scrutiny. Because the *Persica* touches on numerous subjects beyond Achaemenid history and culture—including, but not limited to, Greek historiography and the development of Greek romance—it intersects several topics that have been extensively treated in the scholarly literature. In those instances, this book will betray its roots as a commentary, as I refrain from rehashing well-covered scholarly debates and instead keep the focus on those elements germane to analysis of the chosen case studies. Terminal or representative bibliography is the norm in such cases, to keep notes manageable. These case studies were chosen (in a sense, they chose themselves) to emphasize an overarching point that is not new but seems to need reiteration: Ctesias' *Persica* is not simply a product of the author's active imagination.

While many of its thematic elements can, and of course should, be traced within Greek tradition, several are also at home—indeed, find their origins in—Near Eastern traditions. Some thematic elements of the *Persica* make better sense (or make sense, period) when considered in conjunction with the Near Eastern context.

The phrase "Near Eastern context" is used for convenience, since it encompasses the Iranian and Elamite backdrop as well as the Mesopotamian and, to a much lesser extent, the Egyptian. The term "Mesopotamian" is also used for convenience, referring to Babylonian, Assyrian, Akkadian, Sumerian, and other civilizations that inhabited the greater Fertile Crescent—almost two thousand years of traditions from the geographic region that the Greeks called Mesopotamia. Translations herein are my own unless otherwise noted. The Greek text of the *Persica* and related testimonia referenced or quoted are from Lenfant's definitive edition of 2004, based on Jacoby 1958 (*FGrH* 688), and also Stronk's important edition of 2010. Citations of primary and secondary sources generally follow standard abbreviations found in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition, and the multivolume *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (*CAD*). Achaemenid royal inscriptions are cited in the standard format: king's first initial, superscripted number (if applicable), and location. Lowercase letters demarcate separate inscriptions from the same site; for example, A^2Sd §1 indicates Artaxerxes II, Susa, inscription d, section 1. The spelling of names, always an issue in normalizing words from different languages into English, is not always as consistent as one would like. There is great variety among modern works. More recognizable names from Achaemenid studies are generally spelled in their Latinized form herein, for example Ochus instead of Ochos, Darius instead of Dareios (or Darayavaush), though some adhere to their original Greek endings. Other names tend to approximate standard usage in modern works, for example Ashurbanipal.

Attribution of fragments to the *Persica* is at times a thorny problem. Fragments of questionable status are marked by asterisks as per Lenfant 2004. The reader is directed there and to Stronk 2010 for manuscript commentary, discussions, and references on fragment attribution. This issue is also addressed in the introduction and at other points throughout this book, with frequent cross-references between chapters, reflecting the repetition of themes and motifs in the original *Persica*. The cross-references also serve as a reminder that the case studies discussed herein were not, as they may at times seem, discrete stories but part of an integrated whole.

Several individuals and institutions are to be thanked for their support for this project. A fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies helped the project get off the ground many years ago; a fellowship from the Loeb Classical Library Foundation was instrumental in returning to it, after a long hiatus, and

moving the research toward completion. Research support from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire was critical for the project's continuation, in particular the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, as well as John McCrackin and the excellent InterLibrary Loan staff at UWEC. Great thanks are due also to the Center for Hellenic Studies at Harvard University and the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Fellowships at each provided critical access to library resources as well as interesting and insightful colleagues, whose comments improved several aspects of this work. I also thank Jan Stronk and the late Clyde Smith for their careful eyes, numerous helpful suggestions, and bibliographic acumen; the anonymous reviewers for the University of Wisconsin Press; Laura McClure and Marc Kleijwegt for their encouragement of this project; Jane Barry for careful copyediting; Amber Rose, Raphael Kadushin, Sheila McMahon, and other staff at UW Press for their professionalism and assistance; Beth Dusinberre, Mark Garrison, Jim Muhly, Greg Nagy, Chessie Rochberg, and Margaret Root for sharing images, moral support, and wisdom; and most of all my family, simply but profoundly for being there.

Ctesias' Persica *and Its Near Eastern Context*

Introduction

Ctesias and the *Persica*

Ctesias of Cnidus served as a doctor to the Persian king Artaxerxes II at the turn of the fourth century BCE, and personally attended to the King's wound during the battle of Cunaxa in 401. Following close to a century of Greeks and Egyptians in medical service at the Persian court, Ctesias' presence among the staff was far from a novelty. He was the author of a number of works, including the *Indica* and *On the Tributes of Asia*, but the focus here is on his most famous work, the *Persica*: a history, using the term very loosely, of Assyria, Media, and Persia down to his own time, ca. 400. None of his works has survived in full, but it is clear that Ctesias was widely read in antiquity.

Ctesias' name is derived from a root meaning "acquired" (Greek κτάομαι); in light of his Persian employment, one may wonder whether it was a pseudonym. He was a doctor, son of Ctesiarchus—also a doctor—from the Carian town of Cnidus on the southwestern coast of Asia Minor. Cnidus was an old city, an important center for the study of medicine.[1] It was a nexus of both the Aegean and wider Mediterranean worlds and was also formally part of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Despite the liminal status of many Ionian cities with regard to Athenian, and occasionally Spartan, expansionism in the later fifth and early fourth centuries, from the perspective of the King the entire area was imperial territory: ruled by a Persian satrap in the King's name and answerable to Persian officials. Ctesias was a subject of the King even before he formally entered his service.

The generally accepted figure for Ctesias' sojourn in Persia is seventeen years, but both that number and when those years began and ended remain a matter of sometimes spirited debate. If seventeen years is correct—various modern scholars have attempted to modify the figure in ingenious and vexing ways—that would place him at the Persian court as early as 415, during the last decade of the reign of Darius II. The circumstances of his arrival there (recruited or hired? captured or

Map 1. The Persian Empire in the Achaemenid Period. From Waters 2014. Used by permission of Cambridge University Press.

KAZAKHSTAN
Jaxartes
(Syr Darya)
Aral Sea
MASSAGETAE
SAKA HAUMAVARGA
Caspian Sea
Oxus (Amu Darya)
CHORASMIA
Cyropolis
FERGHANA
SAKA TIGRAKHAUDA
SOGDIANA
Ai-Khanoum
Pamirs
Merv
Balkh
MARGIANA
BACTRIA
Hindu Kush
Himalayas
Mt Damavand
HYRCANIA
Tehran
PARTHIA
ARIA
AFGHANISTAN
Peshawar
GANDARA
PUNJAB
DRANGIANA
ARACHOSIA
Kandahar
Dahan-i Ghulaman
Helmand
Multan
Zagros Mts
KHUZISTAN
SEISTAN
SATTAGYDIA?
Indus
Pasargadae
Anshan
Persepolis
PARSA
INDIA
CARMANIA
Persian Gulf
GEDROSIA
SIND
Land over 1000 metres
0 200 400 600 800 1000 km
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 miles

deported in the context of a revolt?) are in the realm of conjecture. Ctesias' reputation has taken enough hits that some even doubt that he was ever in Persia, with the implication that his works were entirely based on extended hearsay or an active imagination. Ancient authors generally accepted Ctesias' claim of service at the Achaemenid court, as I do, but it remains an open question.[2]

We are not on much firmer ground with the dates of Ctesias' return to Cnidus, his home city. The context involves episodes set in the early 390s: embassies to Evagoras of Cyprus, who was a subject of the Persian king, as well as preparations for the Persian campaign against the Spartans in Asia Minor. Ctesias' proclaimed role in these events has, unsurprisingly, engendered differing interpretations. He asserted that he was entrusted with delivery of important dispatches from the King (T7d, Plut. *Art.* 21.2–4). His travels in this period took him from Cyprus to Ionia, probably via Rhodes, and perhaps to Sparta itself before returning to Cnidus in Ionia. It is there, presumably, that he wrote the *Persica*—or at least finished it. We cannot ascertain when he first worked on it, but from extant excerpts it appears to have been finished sometime in the late 390s.[3]

A witness to the legacy of centuries of high culture in Persia and Babylonia, Ctesias found seemingly limitless sources for inspiration: myriad oral traditions, monumental architecture, sprawling royal and temple complexes, omnipresent (visual and oral) manifestations of ideological expression, cultic rituals. All these and then some provided exotica of great interest to his audience. At the same time, these materials bolstered Ctesias' necessary assertions of authority. As a Greek, writing in Greek for a Greek audience, Ctesias came to prominence in a burgeoning prose tradition interested in all things eastern. The *Persica* itself is a hybrid work, and multiple streams of tradition—very broadly defined as Greek and Near Eastern—are integral and integrated components, not always easily disassociated from one another. While many of Ctesias' themes and motifs are at home within a Greek context, several elements can be indexed as well, if not better, within a Near Eastern one.

Method

The study of Ctesias' *Persica* is fraught with methodological difficulties. If the premise is retained that Ctesias lived and worked at the Achaemenid court, as so many ancient writers took for granted even as they eviscerated his credibility in other matters, it makes sense to look within that context for inspirations for his work—especially for those elements that have no evident antecedent in the Greek tradition. In other words, it should be expected that numerous Near Eastern themes and motifs found their way into Ctesias' work. Correspondences between

motifs or characters—for example, Semiramis and Sargon (see chapter 2)—may be considered no more than expressions of common, cross-cultural folklore motifs; some will maintain that reading anything more into such correspondences is an exercise in futility. That is not the position taken here. In the end, it may remain moot whether a particular element preserved in the Ctesias tradition was in origin or by inspiration specifically Greek or Near Eastern.[4] The case studies analyzed herein have been read through a Near Eastern lens, purposely, with the modest goal of suggesting other ways to contextualize the material Ctesias relayed in his *Persica*, this enormously frustrating but fundamentally important source for Achaemenid Persia and its predecessors and, just as much if not more so, for the evolving Greek and western views of them.

In order to keep the scope of this book manageable, the emphasis is on antecedents: the elements from which Ctesias drew inspiration. The book does not engage concurrent or subsequent manifestations of the same themes in later Classical or Near Eastern works, whether from common origins or not, such as the rich potential for comparisons with material from the Hebrew Bible. For example, the phenomenon of court eunuchs, manifest in Ctesias and various places in the Hebrew Bible (including the Book of Esther), offers potential for numerous parallels.[5] But these two traditions tap, independently, the same sources: the Achaemenid Persian court and its antecedents in Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam. Thus, the Near Eastern context considered for the purposes of this study is one of background, influence, and parallel—all from the perspective of literary antecedents or demonstrably contemporary (to Ctesias) historical phenomena. The aim is to offer some context to explain potential inspiration for Ctesias' material.

Because of the nature of the transmitted text, it is impossible to consider at any length Ctesias' narrative technique, or even his wording, in ways that have productively been done, for example, with Herodotus and other ancient writers.[6] The *Persica* has been generally classified as history and studied by historians—despite manifold questions about Ctesias' reliability and accuracy, or lack thereof (see below). A large part of the issue of reliability is related to the obvious literary underpinnings and romantic elements of Ctesias' work. These are periodically acknowledged, but there is still much to be done. Historians do not generally engage the *Persica*'s literary elements, and literary specialists rarely do more than mention those elements in passing.[7] The Greek portrayals are stereotyped and, as the cliché runs, tell us more about Greek perceptions than about Persian realities. To engage with hypotheticals, if more of the original *Persica* were extant, it seems likely that Ctesias would have a much larger place in the assessment of Greek narratology, especially vis-à-vis the development of romance and the Greek novel. But the application of such approaches to the *Persica* is a tricky business. Debate—perhaps,

rather, despair—about identifying the Ctesian original in his transmitters continues, and no doubt will continue for some time. This debate is acknowledged in the appropriate places below, but many of the particulars have been well covered elsewhere.

The Greek text referenced or quoted herein is from Lenfant's definitive edition (2004), based on those of Jacoby (1958, no. 688) and Stronk (2010). Lenfant (2004) and Stronk (2010) contain the Greek text as well as translations, and the reader is referred to those works for full treatments of the reconstruction of the text and its problems. At no point, save for the fragment Papyrus Oxyrhynchus (POxy) 2330, do I maintain that we have access to the unadulterated, original *Persica*. This is because, clearly, we do not. In order to express this underlying problem appropriately (without tediously repeating formulae such as "at least according to Nicolaus of Damascus' transmission of Ctesias"), I generally refer to Ctesias *not* as the source for the exact wording but rather as the author of the original version and the originator of the thematic elements under discussion.

In other words, "Ctesias' *Persica*" is referenced as a conceit of convenience. That phrasing is not meant to minimize the real problems of whether we are considering Ctesias himself, which of course we are not; whether his writings were blithely copied in theme and plot, if not literally word-for-word, by his transmitters; or whether we are studying Diodorus' or others' modifications of a Ctesian original. I accept—along with many who have worked on this material[8]—that although we do not have the text of the original *Persica*, several thematic elements that were present in the original are discernible and consistent across transmitters. This is not a novel approach, of course; nor is it ideal.

Certain overarching themes and tendencies are conspicuous in their frequency and consistency. They recur across the extant fragments from transmitters removed in time (sometimes by several centuries), place (throughout the eastern Mediterranean), and authorial intent. Some of these recurrent themes were common topoi in both Greek and Near Eastern literature well before Ctesias employed them in his own writing.[9] Beyond that, we ought to consider the possibility that Ctesias, writing for his Greek audience while simultaneously inspired by Near Eastern motifs and legends, was an innovator in his own right. His employment of eunuchs in the narrative (see chapter 1) is one example. Ctesias was exposed directly to multiple influences from his immersion in Near Eastern cultural milieus, an aural witness to the millennia of traditions that he would have encountered at that most cosmopolitan of places, the Achaemenid court. Near Eastern exotica, foreign but fascinating to Greeks, proved fundamental to the *Persica*'s notoriety. It was a text with a high level of energy in antiquity, manifest in the numerous testimonia and citations to it that survive.

Ctesias no doubt thought, or at least hoped, that his audience would appreciate a perspective gained from service as a doctor in the Achaemenid court. This experience gave him credibility, and it put him in good stead in his competition with other Greek writers. His Greek audience was meant to continue to ruminate on his "insider's perspective" as they read his work. It seems unlikely that in the original work Ctesias cited his direct inspiration(s) for the life of Semiramis, for example, instead relying on his purported authority to give credibility to his version of events.[10] What was at the forefront of his mind when he wrote this (hi)story of Semiramis? Was it the Greek topos of the Amazons, with which of course he would have been thoroughly familiar? Or was it the legends of the Mesopotamian builder and warrior kings (and the occasional queen), the prototype manifest in a royal ideology adopted and adapted by the Achaemenids? Or was it the (relative) independence and enormous sociopolitical influence wielded by contemporary Acheaemenid queens? Or, as seems most likely, was it some combination of all of the preceding? We cannot answer this definitively, but a hybrid work reflects its hybrid author.

Transmission of the *Persica*

With the exception of POxy 2330, the only extant fragment that has been attributed to a manuscript copy of the original *Persica*, the manuscript tradition for Ctesias consists of excerpts from later transmitters. Three transmitters account for roughly three-fourths of the extant text: Diodorus Siculus (almost one-third), Nicolaus of Damascus (roughly one-fifth), and Photius (less than one-fourth).[11] The rest is preserved mainly via Plutarch, Athenaeus, and Aelian, with shorter fragments found in a number of other authors. POxy 2330, despite its import, represents a fraction of a percent within this total.

Most of the transmitters listed above span four centuries, from the first century BCE to the third century CE. They lived and wrote under Roman rule throughout the Mediterranean. The ninth-century CE patriarch Photius, voracious reader and epitomizer, lived in the same geographical milieu but at the height of the Byzantine Empire. Attempting to apprehend Ctesias' *Persica* through these different authors, from different times and different places, each with his own agenda, is a fraught enterprise. The term "cover text" is a useful one for contextualizing the phenomenon.[12] The three main transmitters listed above offer a degree of control as cover texts for the *Persica*, but difficulties persist. One may hypothesize Diodorus' or Nicolaus' wholesale invention of material based on a far-removed inspiration from the original. But this seems unnecessarily pessimistic and, indeed, counter to the implications of those authors' own writings. The other extreme is to accept

what is preserved by those authors as a faithful rendering of Ctesias' original. Neither extreme represents my approach. What then? How do we assess, or access, the *Persica*? The identification of recurrent themes and motifs across the multiple transmitters points to one way in which we can apprehend Ctesias' interests, sources of possible inspiration, and ways of applying them.

The *Persica* was divided into twenty-three books, presumably not by its author but by others in antiquity.[13] Books 1–6 covered the Assyrians and the Medes; Books 7–11 (and perhaps part of Book 6) covered the rise and reign of Cyrus the Great. Books 12–13 covered the reigns of Cambyses, the Crisis of 522, Darius I, and Xerxes; Books 14–17, the reign of Artaxerxes I; Books 18–19, the crisis after Artaxerxes I's death through Artaxerxes II's accession; and Books 19–23, the first eight years of Artaxerxes II's reign.[14] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ctesias had much to say about the reign of Artaxerxes II, the king whom he served. The only other king who appears to get anywhere near Artaxerxes II's air-time is Cyrus the Great, the most famous of the Persian kings and the founder-father of the Persian Empire. More legends coalesced around Cyrus than any other ruler, and his prominence in the narrative is not unexpected (see chapter 3). There is some debate about whether Books 1–6 (the so-called *Assyriaca*) constituted a separate work in antiquity, but Photius apparently did not see them as such, and the discrete sections are generally (though not unanimously) viewed as part of one unified work.

Ctesias and the Achaemenid Court

As noted previously, I accept for the purpose of argument that Ctesias did work and live at the Persian court. That experience must be contextualized in order to consider its implications. But the particulars of his association with the court remain frustratingly elusive. How often was he in close proximity to the royal family? With whom and where did he live? When he was not on duty, what did he do with his time? To what sorts of influences was he exposed? To what sorts of information did he have access? The Achaemenid court was a pageant, sprawling and well choreographed when on public display, presenting a combination of pomp and ritual.[15] To coordinate the performance and to keep everything running behind the scenes—not to mention managing a highly centralized, bureaucratic empire—an enormous staff was necessary. Among this host were numerous interpreters, a phenomenon not new or unique to the Achaemenid court.[16] The question of what languages Ctesias could understand has come up often and, without the introduction of some compelling new evidence, is without resolution.[17] What language besides Greek would Ctesias have known, or even had a working knowledge of, before his arrival at court? Perhaps some Aramaic, the lingua franca of the

eastern Mediterranean and the main language of Achaemenid bureaucracy? Other Anatolian languages or dialects?

Over the course of seventeen years, it is reasonable to think that he would have picked up some Old Persian, or whatever Iranian dialect served as the main mode of communication among the Persian royal family and elite. But this is nowhere indicated in the sources—a surprising omission, since if Ctesias was conversant in Persian, it seems safe to suggest that he would not have been bashful about saying so. Or should we assume that in any interactions with the royal family, he was accompanied by an interpreter? Photius' epitome makes cursory mention of a speech that Ctesias made to the King (F30 §73–74), in the context of the negotiations between Evagoras and Artaxerxes II. No indication is given whether Ctesias spoke in a language the King could understand or whether his speech was relayed by an interpreter. It is difficult to believe that Ctesias did not have some basic facility in a language (or languages) with which he could communicate with the royal family, though in important or delicate matters the use of an interpreter would not be surprising.[18]

Knowledge of Old Persian, Elamite, or Babylonian cuneiform must be considered out of the question, but it does not seem far-fetched to assume that Ctesias encountered people who had such facility. Whether he put that access to good use is a separate question, but the answer seems obvious: no. Certainly various members of the court staff had knowledge of—or direct training within—previous centuries of Babylonian and Elamite traditions. Parysatis herself, with a Babylonian mother, may be assumed to have been educated at whatever level was appropriate for women of her status.[19] In the less likely scenario that Ctesias was cloistered from court scribes and scholars, he would have been exposed to whatever parts of the canon lived on via oral traditions or was kept alive by professional singers and storytellers.[20]

In acknowledgment of the argument that Ctesias was never at the Persian court, it must be noted that he had reliable sources for some of the major players during the reigns of Darius II and Artaxerxes II, especially those involved in the succession crisis after Artaxerxes I's death. This has been well established through comparisons with material from the Murashu archive from Nippur. Arbarios, Sogdianos' cavalry commander who joined Ochus' rebellion, has been identified as the Arbareme who held the equerry's estate in Babylonia. Artoxares (see chapter 2), a prominent supporter of Ochus (Darius II), has been identified with the Artahsharu who was granted the estate of Sogdianos' supporter Menostanes, who is the Manushtana of Murashu texts.[21] Regardless of how Ctesias may have modified these individuals and their roles in his narrative, it is clear that they were based on historical figures.

Historian or Romance Writer? Lies and Bizarre Tales

Often consulted as a history, the *Persica* reveals itself time and again as not up to the task. Yet it remains the main, and sometimes the only, narrative source for several key episodes in the Achaemenid Empire's history and, in particular, for a period that is not well represented in extant accounts—from the assassination of Xerxes I through the reign of Darius II (465 into the late 420s). Scattered sources, Near Eastern and Greek, give chronological markers for this period but offer few details. Conversely, the details that Ctesias does offer—or the details offered by those who used and transmitted his work, a caveat that must be kept in mind—are often salacious or obviously muddled. Ever since F. Jacoby's damning assessment in 1922, Ctesias has seldom been taken seriously.[22]

Ctesias' own efforts to cast his *Persica* as a rival to Herodotus' great work were relayed by Photius (T8): "In nearly all instances his [Ctesias'] account is antithetical to Herodotus, and he even repudiates him often as a liar and calls him out as a writer of fables. For he is younger than Herodotus. He says that for the majority of things that he recounts, he was an eyewitness or, when that was not possible, he heard it straight from the Persians themselves. Thus he composed his history."[23] It is clear from Photius' summary remark that Ctesias was operating within the agonistic parameters of the Greek historiographic tradition. His desire to correct—or, perhaps, discredit—his famous predecessor Herodotus was a standard tactic in that agonistic tradition. Herodotus published his history sometime in the 420s, and we have it in its entirety. That in itself puts the *Persica* at a disadvantage in any comparison, but the often-acknowledged reality is that Ctesias' skills as a historian were not highly regarded even in antiquity.

If questions remain on how exactly to classify Herodotus, Ctesias is even harder to place. Comparisons between the two have, inevitably, dominated discussions about Ctesias' reliability or lack thereof.[24] Herodotus' text demanded audience engagement, and the same should be assumed for Ctesias' *Persica*. But the *Persica* cannot be subjected to the scourging that Herodotus and other early prose writers have undergone. If the *Persica* did not achieve the same level of literary art, it was a product of its times: the intellectual milieu of the early fourth century BCE. An important component that set the *Persica* apart was its viewpoint, which adopted and adapted—in fact, relied upon—myriad Near Eastern legends and motifs to distinguish it from the works of Herodotus and other rivals. How Ctesias distinguished, if he did distinguish, historical writing from other genres is unknown. Thucydides' strictures on the methodology of other writers (1.20–22) indicate that at least one of Ctesias' contemporaries was making such distinctions. But it is difficult, and this is an understatement, to compare Ctesias and Thucydides.

Ctesias' portrayal of pre-Achaemenid empires was, for better or worse (most historians judge the latter), fundamental to the idea of a sequence of empires from Assyria through Media to Persia, a concept that persists in modern scholarship. This is a typically Greek conceptualization that overplays the Medes' place therein.[25] Ctesias was doing nothing less than treating the most important geopolitical phenomenon of his times, the Achaemenid Empire. It can be difficult to appreciate the impact of the world's only hyperpower upon the development of the so-called Greek miracle, but that is a story for another context. Greek writers anachronistically projected many elements of their understanding of the contemporary Persian Empire—or, often, their misunderstanding—upon the Medes and the Assyrians. Greek writers before Berossus ignored the Neo-Babylonian Empire (often termed "Chaldean") as a separate entity or conflated it with the Neo-Assyrian. Ctesias is no exception. This Greek model of "continuity of empires" has been demonstrated to be not only unsuitable for explaining the rise of the Persian Empire but also historically inaccurate.[26] The traditional view of the Median "Empire"—assembled by Deioces and his successors in Herodotus, by Arbakes and his successors in Ctesias—took a massive hit with the publication of *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia* (Lanfranchi, Roaf, and Rollinger 2003), and it has been reeling since.

Because of his perverse representation of the history of the Persian Empire and its predecessors, Ctesias' reputation has not fared well. To anyone who has spent time with the extant work, the reasons are obvious and echo the criticisms of many ancient writers. Aelian, in *On the Nature of Animals* 4.21, derives from Ctesias' *Indica* a detailed description of a martichora, an Indian beast with the face of a man, the body of a lion, and a tail with poisonous stingers that could be launched like arrows at pursuers. Aelian ends the lengthy description as follows: "Ctesias says that he has seen this creature in Persia given as a gift from the Indians to the Persian king, if indeed Ctesias may be considered a reliable witness about such things. After one hears the particularities of this creature, however, then let him consider the source."[27] Aelian's snide comment does not encompass the sum total of ancient attitudes toward Ctesias, but it is representative.[28] Such attitudes appear not to have harmed Ctesias' popularity, however, as his *Persica* and other works were widely read and frequently consulted. Like others of his ilk, Ctesias also aimed to astonish, and recording marvels from distant lands was a way to do this.[29] That Diodorus, Nicolaus, and Plutarch—among many others—made frequent use of Ctesias' work testifies to its influence and staying power, especially vis-à-vis other fourth-century Ionian writers on Persia, such as Deinon of Colophon (father of the Alexander historian Cleitarchus) or Heraclides of Cyme.[30]

What has survived of Ctesias tends toward storytelling or romance. His mistakes and sensationalism at the expense of historicity have been documented repeatedly and at length.[31] The term "historian" has been applied to him, it seems, mainly

because the Greek term *historia* and its variants are used in the ancient testimonies. Similarly, as noted above, Photius recorded Ctesias' explicit desire to, in effect, measure his work against that of Herodotus (T8). Few specialists now refer to Ctesias as a historian, as we understand the term. He is difficult to categorize. What to call him? Or his work? J. Stronk's analysis situating him in the realm of the poets is productive,[32] with emphasis on—among other things—writing that was pleasing and aimed at instruction. Since the *Persica* was of course a prose work, we may alternatively consider it a proto-"historical novel," a phrase applied with much qualification and at some risk of oversimplification.[33] It is perhaps a telling coincidence that one of the earliest novels on record, from the first century BCE, is a love story between two characters called Ninus and Semiramis, both vastly different from their namesakes in the *Persica*.

The Near Eastern Context

The vast Persian Empire encompassed many discrete traditions even within the central administration: Persian/Iranian, of course, Elamite, Babylonian, and Aramaean, just to name the most prominent (see map 1). The account of Darius I's accession as related in the Bisitun Inscription and relief (fig. 1) offers an example of the empire's scope; not incidentally, the story is well known from both Herodotus and Ctesias. Commissioned by Darius ca. 520, the Bisitun Inscription was inscribed in cuneiform scripts of three linguistically unrelated languages: Elamite, generally classified as "unaffiliated"; Old Persian, classified as Indo-Iranian; and Akkadian, classified as eastern Semitic. These languages represented the three main traditions of the empire's core and were thereafter consistently used in royal inscriptions. In Darius' Bisitun Inscription, we find new (to us at least) expressions of Iranian religious sensibilities, adaptations of very old motifs of royal ideology, and echoes of the Mesopotamian substitute-king ritual. These elements are all manifest, in varying degrees, in Ctesias' *Persica* as well as other Greek works. And that is only the beginning—or, rather, the end of centuries of written tradition within Mesopotamia and Elam (and, by extension, Egypt) to which the Persians were heirs and in which they were innovators.

Within the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Persian Empire and the royal court, how may we identify Near Eastern elements? If we recall again the central fact that Ctesias was a Greek educated in and conversant with the Greek literary tradition, writing in Greek for a Greek audience, it may seem unorthodox to regard him through a Near Eastern lens, but the subject matter invites one to do so. While feminization and inversion are fully at home within Greek literature, they are hardly unknown in Mesopotamian. Figures such as Semiramis (see chapter 2),

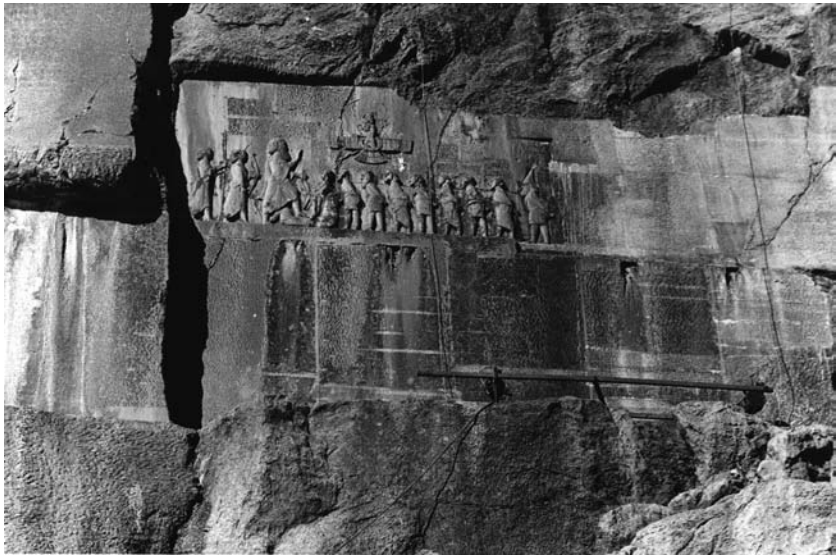

Figure 1. Bisitun Relief and Inscriptions of Darius I, Mount Bisitun, Iran. Courtesy of Margaret Cool Root and the Cameron Archive, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

already known to a Greek audience before Ctesias, follow topoi that were prominent in Mesopotamian texts for centuries before. As Ctesias himself was a hybrid, an Ionian Greek serving at the Achaemenid court, so too, unsurprisingly, was his work.

To put it another way, this book seeks to focalize how Ctesias' "lies and bizarre tales"[34] may be contextualized in a Near Eastern historical and literary milieu. Comparisons have been made with Iranian elements that manifest in later Persian tradition (e.g., during the Sasanian period and later in the *Shahnameh*), but—with few, though notable, exceptions—rather less so with the Mesopotamian elements. The literary and oral traditions of Assyria and Babylonia find their origins two thousand years before the Persian Empire, with the Sumerians and Akkadians of the third millennium. Stories originating in that period were still in circulation, and the weight of tradition persisted into Persian times, especially in relation to Persian rule in Babylonia. Kings modeled their attributes and accomplishments on earlier kings and heroes, as part of this long tradition, and it is hardly surprising to find these elements in Ctesias' work on the Persians and their predecessors.

The Mesopotamian written canon was extensive and varied, and its oral complements were undoubtedly more so. A vibrant tradition of storytelling is traceable throughout Near Eastern history and manifest even today—for example,

the popular story of the death of Dara (Darius III) in the arms of Iskandar. Tales such as *The Poor Man of Nippur* (see chapter 3) and stories about the brothers Sarbanabal and Sarmuge (i.e., Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin) and the sage Ahiqar testify to the popularity of these unsurprisingly rich but elusive oral traditions set within powerful institutions, such as the Assyrian royal court.[35] Although their elements rarely intersect directly with the *Persica*, they represent the same phenomenon in an indigenous Near Eastern (rather than foreign Greek) milieu.

This book is organized around a series of case studies that illustrate prominent Near Eastern traditions and motifs in the *Persica*. Chapter 1 engages the problem of identifying literal eunuchs (castrati) in the Near Eastern source material as a preliminary to examining Ctesias' dramatic employment of eunuchs, associated with specific motifs, in his narrative. Chapter 2 considers the Semiramis story as a Ctesian rendition of the legends of Sargon of Akkad, so formative for Assyrian and Babylonian, and ultimately Persian, ideologies of kingship. Chapter 3 critiques Ctesias' unique retelling of Cyrus the Great's origins and rise to power, with its curious departure from the version rendered by Herodotus and, for that matter, its divergence from the royal lineage espoused by Cyrus himself in the inscriptional record. Chapter 4 compiles other extant stories from the *Persica* and reviews how they may be interpreted from a Near Eastern perspective: renderings of feminization and inversion, among other motifs, that manifest aspects of Achaemenid ideology and royal practice, considered on a continuum with their imperial predecessors.

Ctesias and His Sources

As noted previously, Ctesias asserted his own authorial authority in a traditional Greek manner, casting his predecessors and rivals as idiots. Ideally one might contrast the expressed aims of Herodotus, who of course had a penchant for storytelling himself, or Diodorus Siculus and other Greek authors who emphasize great deeds. But we do not have a proem by Ctesias himself for comparison,[36] and we must continue to qualify all statements through the filter of his transmitters. In light of his overemphasis on the fantastic and the scandalous, however, it is impossible to envision a proem of the sort that Thucydides gives us.

Of the numerous ongoing questions about Ctesias' sources and reliability, one that has a lot of mileage is his claim to have consulted the Persian royal records, the *basilikai diphtherai* (Diod. Sic. 2.32.4) and *basilikai anagraphai* (2.22.5), written on leather or inscribed.[37] Some have labored mightily to justify Ctesias' assertion. Doubts have been put forward about the type, content, value, and occasionally even the existence of royal archives that Ctesias may, or may not, have referenced.

Ctesias' candor on this issue is fair game, of course, but it is quite surprising that some of the latter doubts have persisted. Examples of Near Eastern royal records and archives are legion. The Persepolis Fortification archive itself, and the burgeoning list of publications based on it, represent a massive endorsement for a sophisticated central bureaucracy demonstrably connected to others throughout the empire.[38]

The tradition of such archives in both Elam and Mesopotamia stretches back centuries before the period in question. Voluminous royal, private, and temple archives dealt with day-to-day administrative matters and would generally not contain the type of information Ctesias meant, but there are other well-known examples of those that could qualify as "royal records": chronicles, astronomical diaries, and other scientific texts that recorded specific information about major historical events. Detailed Babylonian records tracking Cyrus the Great's entry into Babylon on 29 October 539 have survived.[39] A notable Persian example of a royal record may be cited as well. In the famous paragraph 70 of the Bisitun Inscription (see fig. 1), Darius wrote: "Both on clay and on parchment it [i.e., this inscription] was recorded."[40] Darius further stated that he distributed this account throughout the empire; Akkadian fragments of the text found in Babylon and an Aramaic version from Elephantine in southern Egypt substantiate the claim. That is a paradigmatic "royal record," one that Ctesias evidently did not consult.

To give another example, Babylonian astronomical diaries contain records of weather reports, prices of commodities, and allusions to historical events relevant to the astronomical observations that were associated with ominous phenomena—signs from the gods. For the gods' sakes, there are extant copies of such texts dating from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II in the early sixth century to that of Darius III in the later fourth and into the Seleucid period.[41] These may be considered "royal records" regardless of where they were housed. Esagil, the great temple of Marduk, "seems to have fulfilled the role of general reference library in Babylon until the end of the Hellenistic period."[42] It was unlikely to have been the only one.

It stretches credulity to envision Ctesias consulting texts within such a library, but he must have known of their existence. And the existence of such archives and libraries was, for his purposes, what mattered. When he appealed to sources therein—without ever having consulted them directly—he was making an impressive (if not verifiable) claim. It is conceivable (though not provable) that in Babylon and other places, through some court functionaries, Ctesias had indirect access to this material; it does not mean that he took advantage of it. Whether this conceptual access occurred within earshot of such materials being read and discussed—presumably in a tongue that Ctesias or some other aural witnesses could understand and transmit, such as Aramaic—or was accessed by other means, remains an open question. As one example, the tablet BM 113249 records an explicit request via

messenger from King Cambyses to the Eanna temple staff at Uruk to be shown stelae from previous kings.[43] These traditions were kept alive and were still in circulation. An often-cited passage from the Book of Esther (6.1) also alludes to such records: "On that night, the king could not sleep; and he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king."[44] Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh, burned in 612 BCE, would not have been the only repository of chronicles, poems, stories, and other materials that preserved the written records of previous administrations as well as the literary canon.

Many of the extant copies of the so-called Neo-Babylonian chronicle series stem from Babylon: the Nabopolassar Chronicle, a fragment of a chronicle dealing with Artaxerxes III's reign, and another chronicle concerning Darius III and Alexander, to list only a sample.[45] However one wishes to define "royal records," these documents, accessible to and consulted by the kings and their advisors, must be included under that rubric. Given the detail preserved in these chronicles and diaries, if Ctesias had the means or ambition to access them (again, at best, at second hand, through other members of the palace staff), he would have had too much information at his disposal, including accurate dates for and details about a number of historical events. Of course, both means and ambition must be questioned, because if Ctesias ever took advantage of even indirect access to those records, it is not obvious. Historical accuracy as we define it was not a high priority. Rather, the types of information (or data) that caught his interest—manifest in these royal records but certainly more embellished and more exciting in the oral traditions that sprang from them—were those that could be forged into a good story, a "history" as he understood the term.

Ctesias' lackadaisical attitude toward proper historical research is manifest at several points. The chronological transposition of the battles of Salamis and Plataea is an often-cited example.[46] It is impossible to believe that the so-called *basilikai anagraphai*—on the Babylonian model at any rate—would not have contained precise dates and details of these events, such as whether the moon could be seen in Babylon on the relevant days, or which way the wind was blowing. Documents with precisely this sort of information, as discussed above, date from the reigns of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II to Darius III and beyond. How well those detailed archival records matched up with oral traditions about these events, of course, is an entirely different matter. For his Near Eastern inspiration, the conclusion must be that Ctesias relied mainly (only?) upon oral reports; any information from documentary sources, mostly, one presumes, acquired at second hand (at best), was subordinated to his literary pretensions. It is not a coincidence that the more obviously fictional elements of the *Persica* are further removed from Ctesias' own time—for example, the stories of Semiramis, the Median rebellion against

Assyria, and even his reports of Cyrus the Great, material discussed from chapter 2 through the first part of chapter 4. It is these elements that find the most frequent and compelling parallels in Near Eastern traditions. The line between history and fiction is less easily discernible in those characters and stories of Ctesias' personal experiences: eunuchs (chapter 1) and the Persian noble families of Megabyzus and Hydarnes (chapters 4 and 5).

Several testimonia (e.g., T8b) indicate that Queen Parysatis herself, among other unidentified Persians, was a source for Ctesias. Immensely valuable and rich, anecdotal or second-hand oral reports may be far removed from the official, documentary versions (though the reverse might be the case as well), and thus a lesser substitute for a historian. But there is no denying the literary appeal of embellished content. Ctesias' sojourn in the core of the Persian Empire and his service to the royal family were the bedrock of his authority. By extension, he also had (or claimed to have) something that Herodotus did not: access to the "royal records"—even if he never actually read them.

1 The Eunuch In-between

Eunuchs as palace servants and officials were a Near Eastern institution. Ctesias was one of the earliest known writers to popularize the stereotypical Greek portrait of the eunuch that left such an imprint on subsequent western literature. The eunuchs in the *Persica* manifest his interest in opposites and inversion, an interest that corresponds with wider Greek perceptions of the "barbarian": the great Other, typified during the Classical period by the Persians. The Greek-barbarian antithesis was well entrenched by Ctesias' time, and he had several models in the Greek tragedians for inspiration.[1] Herodotus, of course, preceded Ctesias in incorporating eunuchs into his work, but they did not assume nearly the prominence in Herodotus' narrative that they do in Ctesias'. Ctesias' employment of eunuchs as liminal figures finds no significant antecedents in the extant prose literature.

This chapter has three discrete sections: an assessment of eunuchs in their Near Eastern context; a register of eunuchs in the *Persica*; and an examination of Ctesias' eunuchs from a thematic perspective. Matching his eunuchs to particular motifs makes it evident that Ctesias' eunuchs served primarily literary purposes, regardless of their historicity (if any) as individuals or that of the particular events with which they were associated in his narrative. Recent scholarly discussions on eunuchs in Ctesias have focused on whether a particular individual identified as a eunuch was a castrato. The level of influence and prestige of his eunuchs does not coincide with the status typically attributed to a court eunuch, that of a low-level domestic servant. It is unclear whether being a castrato or not was relevant to holding particular offices within the administrative hierarchy. The uncertainty is linked to two discrete and intractable problems. Is there specific terminology that applied to domestic servants or administrators who were castrati? And how pervasive were eunuchs in the upper echelons of the Achaemenid court? The approach applied in this chapter is not to deny that Ctesias' eunuchs were historical figures, or castrati, but rather to emphasize that their employment in the *Persica* manifests literary tropes. They had specific roles to play in Ctesias' narrative.

The caveat discussed in the introduction applies here as elsewhere: one must consider the sources who transmitted his text. In any discussion of Ctesias' eunuchs, Photius' epitome comes to the fore among the various transmitters. It is his work that emphasizes which eunuchs were powerful or influential under a given Persian king, yet the criteria for his often extremely condensed summaries are not always evident.[2] This makes it difficult to discern at what level Photius' emphasis reflects his own times—since eunuchism was commonplace in the Byzantine period[3]—or may be considered a proportionate rendering of eunuchs' prominence in the original *Persica*.

The stereotype of the eunuch as effeminate, conniving, and associated with licentious behavior originated in works of the Classical period and was further developed through the Byzantine and Ottoman eras. According to Athenaeus (12.515e), eunuchism was an ancient institution in Lydia, though it was certainly not unique to that region.[4] Western Anatolia, including Ctesias' home audience in Caria, was familiar with eunuchs. The same observation may be made for Herodotus of Halicarnassus, but an emphasis on eunuchs was one way in which Ctesias set his work apart from Herodotus'.

Although eunuchs are frequently mentioned in sources of the Classical period, systematic treatments for that period are thin.[5] To ground this exploration of eunuchs' liminal space within the *Persica*, therefore, some contextualization is in order. V. Turner's seminal *Ritual Process* demarcates the liminal, ironic as that statement seems: "Attributes of liminality . . . are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (1969, 95).

The occupation of liminal space is appropriate for a eunuch, whose physical being is itself liminal. The eunuch's most obvious in-between aspect is the space between man and woman.[6] The eunuch was born male but, after the separation or nullification of the testicles, took on the attributes of a female; any distinction between physical and social attributes is unimportant here. The eunuch was not a woman but was certainly no longer considered a man. The eunuch was imperfect, even incomplete—a view also projected onto women in many cultures. Similarly, overt or implied sexual availability (passive, not aggressive) was often a shared trait of women and eunuchs.[7] Some sculptures from the Palace of Darius at Persepolis portray attendants without beards, bearing towel and bottle, on the door jambs leading inward to what have been identified as private apartments (fig. 2). If these were indeed eunuchs in the literal sense, this artistic representation also typifies their in-between status: the passage from the court into the inner chambers.[8]

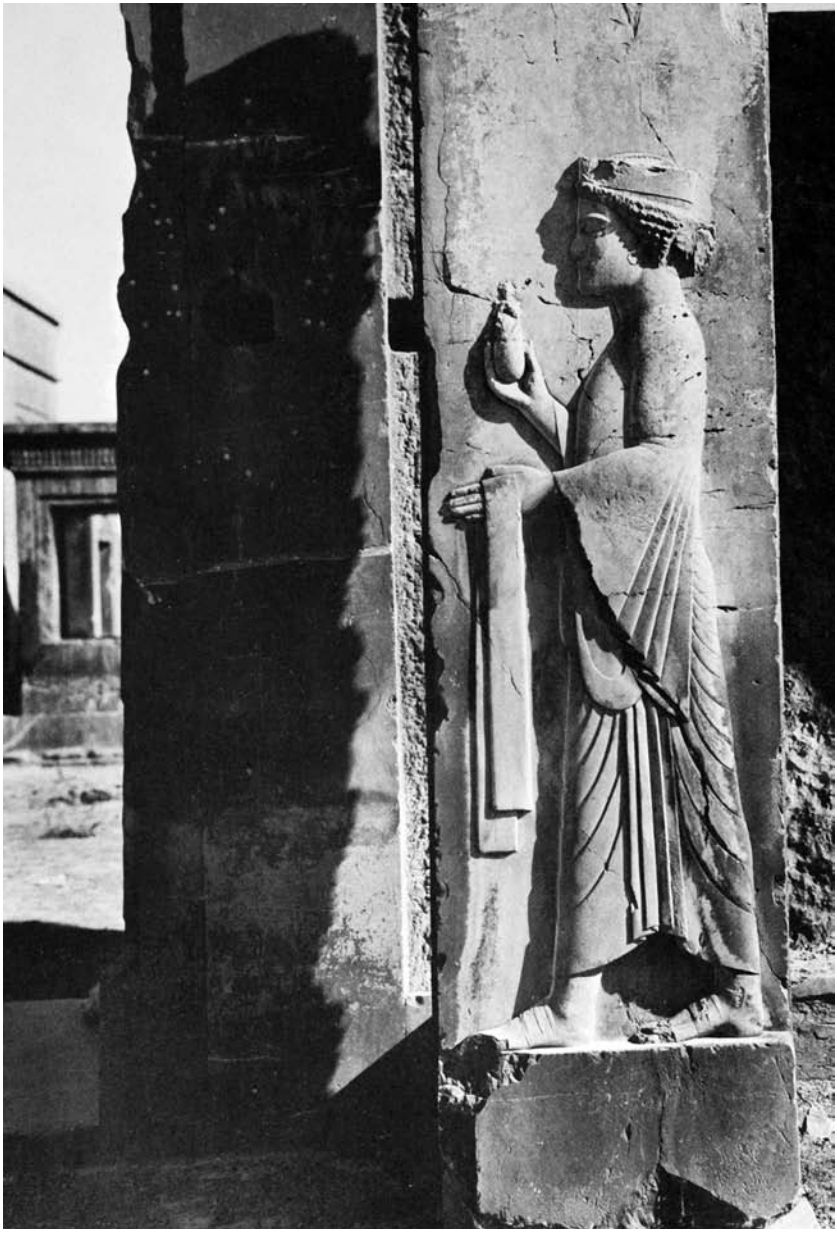

Figure 2. Eunuch (?) attendant, Palace of Darius, Persepolis. From E. Schmitt 1953, plate 149. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Figure 3. Treasury Relief, Persepolis. From E. Schmitt 1953, plate 121. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Compare, for example, the representation—within a much different context, of course—of the bashlyk-wearing towel-bearer of the so-called Treasury Relief (fig. 3).

In the works of Ctesias and other Greek writers, a eunuch's prominence is correlative to the degree of access to members of the royal family in both the private and the public sphere.[9] Some have argued against rejecting out of hand the historicity of Ctesias' "influential" eunuchs—regardless of their actual position in the court hierarchy—because they were the ones with access to the harem, that nexus of the personal and the political. The word "harem," which carries its own baggage, may be taken to encompass the domestic, or inner, quarters of the palace that were off-limits to all but the King and his family (i.e., the women and children who dwelt there)—and the eunuchs.[10] The eunuchs' access, their ability to bridge the divide, to move between, was fundamental to whatever influence they may have wielded.

It is necessary to emphasize again that with Ctesias' *Persica* we are in a literary world, which is not to say that the entire construct resided only in the author's imagination. Questions herein about the historicity of Ctesias' eunuchs are preliminary, broached mainly to contextualize the Near Eastern milieu, and are secondary to the thematic issues. The Near Eastern sources have their own limitations, but they offer necessary context for the main focus of this chapter: the literary eunuch who inhabits a liminal world (and, as discussed above, is liminal himself), who resides in the in-between: between the King and his women, between the King and his court, between the King and his rivals, and between life and death.

Finding (and Losing) Eunuchs: Assyrian and Babylonian Evidence

Ctesias' *Persica* bursts with eunuchs, several, but not all, identified by name. Well attested in several sources were castrated men serving as lower-level members of the standard palace staff. These were eunuchs in the traditional sense, whose main function goes back to the etymology of the Greek word εὐνοῦχος: ὁ τὴν εὐνὴν ἔχων (literally "the one holding [i.e., guarding] the bed"). Beyond that group of domestic servants, many of the named eunuchs in Ctesias appear to be high-ranking officials, some commanding military forces, some even members of the nobility. Many scholars have suspected that not all those whom Ctesias labeled as eunuchs were really eunuchs in the regularly understood sense of the Greek word—that is, castrati—but were misidentified by him through a misunderstanding or conflation of Achaemenid administrative hierarchy. This is a matter of ongoing debate (see below). P. Briant (2002, 276) frames a distinction:

> It is rather tempting to think that there were two kinds of eunuchs at the Persian court: (1) the castrated men, reduced to palace slavery and used in specific contexts (at a higher or lesser rank in the domestic hierarchy); and (2) the eunuchs in the sense of the court hierarchy, that is, nobles (Persian or Iranian) in the king's immediate circle who differentiated themselves according to their own hierarchy. . . . In many cases those whom the Greek texts call eunuchs were nothing other than holders of high court positions in the king's entourage.

It does not necessarily follow that Ctesias was wrong in every instance: that is, that those individuals whom he identified with the Greek term εὐνοῦχος were not castrati. Nor does it have to be a question of one or the other—either all were genuine eunuchs or all were not. It is no mean task to reconcile terms—Sumerian tiru, Akkadian *ša rēši*, Greek εὐνοῦχος—from three linguistically unrelated languages, used over several centuries within different cultural contexts, and it is not surprising that this issue remains intractable. The ambiguity feeds into the problem of assessing the eunuchs of the *Persica*. The earliest references occur in Sumerian literary texts, the extant copies of which were composed during the Old Babylonian period (nineteenth or eighteenth centuries BCE), with originals likely dating to the Ur III period (twenty-first century).[11] The Sumerian word tiru is generally equated with Akkadian *mār ekalli* (literally "son of the palace") and subsequently *ša rēši*, and thus translated "courtier," though some scholars prefer the translation "eunuch."[12]

In the Sumerian creation myth *Enki and Ninmah*, one of the creatures created is the tiru (lines 75–78): "Sixth, she fashioned one with neither penis nor vagina on its body. Enki looked at the one with neither penis nor vagina on its body and gave it the name 'Nibru eunuch (?),' and decreed as its fate to stand before the king."[13] "Nibru" (transliterated ^{d}nibru^{ki}) refers to the city of Nippur, here translated as an appellative. The question mark indicates the uncertain translation of tiru. Standing "before the king" may be an appropriate role for a eunuch, but the same description might also apply to other courtiers who were not eunuchs.

The same word, tiru, occurs in the Sumerian poem *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*. Gilgamesh questions Enkidu about the many spirits whom Enkidu saw in the underworld, including the tiru (lines 268–72):

> GILGAMESH: "Did you see the palace eunuch [tiru]?"
> ENKIDU: "I saw him."
> GILGAMESH: "How does he fare?"
> ENKIDU: "Like a useless *alala* stick he is propped in a corner."[14]

About this passage, A. George (1997) notes:

> The word tiru (Akk. *tīrum*) . . . is a generic term often applied to personnel who were members of the palace household (*māri ekallim*) and attendant on the royal family (*manzāz pānī*). Thus diverse workers such as scribes, physicians, charioteers, butlers, bakers and barbers could all be designated tiru. Given the common Near Eastern practice of using eunuchs as royal servants, especially those whose responsibilities brought them into regular contact with the palace women, we have to consider it very likely that the tiru was childless because he was castrated.

The identification of a Sumerian term that may be translated as "eunuch" in some contexts would offer confirmation of the long-standing institution of eunuchism. George does not address this particular issue, but that is not his focus. Nevertheless, establishing that the Sumerian term may be applied to a variety of officials, who may or may not be literal eunuchs (thus the translation "courtier"), gets us no closer to confidently identifying literal eunuchs (castrati) in Mesopotamian texts.

Discussion of the first-millennium evidence centers on the term *ša rēši šarri* (literally "one who is at the head of the king"). The term occurs in a number of variants in the texts but is commonly found in the shortened form *ša rēši*. This term and its correlatives, such as Neo-Assyrian *šut rēši*, are commonly translated as

"eunuch" in many modern editions of Akkadian texts. The term is linguistically independent from any usage in Classical texts, but its understanding has been influenced by those same texts' formulations of Near Eastern court ceremony and personnel. This includes Achaemenid-era evidence, which brings the circle back around to Ctesias. The translation "eunuch" for *ša rēši* is also disputed.[15] Its application may be broader than Sumerian tiru, but that impression may simply reflect more attestations of the Akkadian word in more types of texts: literary, historical, and administrative.

The term *ša rēši* had several applications in a variety of court and administrative contexts. It could be associated with high-ranking court titles as well as military functions. Castration does not preclude performing these functions or holding high office, but there are examples of men holding these high offices with sons (apparently of natural issue, not by adoption), and uncertainties in translation allow various interpretations.[16] The issues are complex, and arguments for identifying eunuchs easily become circular. To translate the term as "eunuch," without qualification, will not do. Further, the debate on the translation and application of the terms is only the beginning. If the Sumerian texts discussed refer to eunuchs as we understand them, the institution (if it may be termed that) began quite early, perhaps before the end of the third millennium.

M. Jursa's contribution to the volume *Ktesias' Welt* (Wiesehöfer, Rollinger, and Lanfranchi 2011) surveys the first-millennium evidence for the title *ša rēši* and its variants.[17] The variations in associated title and function and in the social standing of those holding the title are striking. His list is by no means exhaustive (as Jursa himself notes), but it presents a spectrum of palace- and military-related administration. There are significant gaps in the evidence, but even so Jursa is able to list over forty instances, including a small but important sample from the Achaemenid period (2011, 167).

In light of the sheer quantity of Neo-Babylonian material and the rate at which it is being published, it is reasonable to assume that the data-set will increase. Reassessment of old evidence in light of the new offers additional perspectives. N. de Zorzi and M. Jursa's reanalysis of a tablet containing commentary on the Mesopotamian omen series *Šumma izbu* is one example; the tablet provides a series of entries containing explanations of terms.[18] One of the entries equates the Akkadian term *mār ekalli* (Sumerian dumu é gal), "son of the palace" (i.e., a courtier), with Akkadian *ša rēši*; that is, the entry labels the two terms as synonymous. Further, Zorzi and Jursa's reconstruction of the passage—including some minor restorations that do not change its general sense—suggests that the *mār ekalli* / *ša rēši* was called "son of the palace" because the child's loyalty was effectively transferred

from his family to the palace. Zorzi and Jursa translate the lines in question as follows: "'Courtier' (lit.: 'son of the palace') (means) *ša rēši* ('courtier') because as a child [he was summo]ned [to the palace] (and) did not return to (his) father."

As they note, this text and reading do not settle the question of whether *ša rēši*s were eunuchs, but the entry emphasizes the implied loyalty of the new courtier-in-training. It anticipates, at least in perspective, the excursus of Cyrus in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (7.5.59–65) on the value of eunuchs, in which a eunuch's loyalty is his most significant attribute. This Akkadian equivalency echoes the Sumerian usage described above, but how to apply it to an individual case—that is, how to ascertain if a particular *ša rēši* was a eunuch—remains opaque.

G. Barjamovic's (2011) useful survey of the Assyrian royal eunuchs emphasizes a long-noticed distinction among male officials: the *ša ziqni* (bearded) and the *ša rēši* (beardless). The latter's "kinship" was with the palace and king rather than the traditional family unit. Barjamovic maintains the *ša rēši*–eunuch equation, emphasizing that the *ša rēši* produced "successors" while the *ša ziqni* produced "sons." In order to assure the *ša rēši*'s well-being in the afterlife through regular offerings, these successors would have been adopted or provisions would have been made through the palace. But, to echo a point made throughout this section, the evidence is not straightforward. Other explanations have been put forward to explain the lack of facial hair.[19] The only constant is that the term *ša rēši* appears to be inconsistently applied to individuals who may be identified as true eunuchs.

Another issue is whether the distinction between *ša ziqni* and *ša rēši* was based on the presence of actual (i.e., natural) facial hair or referred to costume. The distinction in terminology must apply in a formal context, in which any beard referenced by the *ša ziqni* would presumably be the false beards—of varying elaborateness according to rank—worn by the king and his officials. In other words, "bearded" may apply to the *ša ziqni*'s court regalia, regardless of whether he had true facial hair or not, rendering this physiognomic distinction between eunuch and non-eunuch irrelevant. If this is correct, and "if" is the operative word in that clause, a true eunuch might have been counted as a *ša ziqni* simply by wearing a false beard in court ceremony (perhaps as in the Artoxares episode narrated below in this chapter). Ultimately, the *ša ziqni* / *ša rēši* distinction in the documentary sources leaves us with more questions than answers.

The distinction is hard to maintain when considering the art historical record as well. In the sculptures of the North Palace and the Southwest Palace at Nineveh, among other palaces, bearded and beardless male figures perform a variety of functions in the entourage of the king.[20] Two prominent *šūt rēši*s appear in the celebrated relief sequence that portrays the aftermath of Ashurbanipal's defeat of

the Elamite king Te'umman in 653 at the battle of Tell Tuba. One Assyrian *šūt rēši* is portrayed literally leading by the hand the Elamite prince Huban-nikaš II, whom Ashurbanipal had installed as king of Elam in 653. This *šūt rēši* was presumably a high-ranking official, and he is noticeably beardless. An Elamite *šūt rēši*, Ituni, was portrayed, with identifying epigraph, in both the Southwest Palace and the North Palace of Nineveh in another portion of the same large relief sequence as the Assyrian *šūt rēši* just mentioned.[21] A number of beardless figures may be found throughout that relief program: some dead on the field, others as officials and attendants. Must they all be considered eunuchs?

The Conniving *šūt rēši*: An Assyrian Motif

The idea that Ctesias conflated administrative titles with terms designating royal eunuchs may point to the inspiration for his character-type of the perfidious eunuch. Within Greek literature, Ctesias ought to be considered an innovator in this regard. Direct access to Near Eastern traditions would have given him a lot of material with which to work. Assyrian annals, literary pieces in their own right and sources of ideological inspiration for their Babylonian and Persian successors, contained the very character-type made famous by Ctesias' eunuchs: the conniving courtier. A prominent example from the reign of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, the perfidious Marduk-šum-ibni, was a *šūt rēši* of the Elamite king Urtak, who reigned from 664 to 653. For purposes of "dramatic retelling," let us assume, without any corroboration beyond administrative title, that the high-ranking Marduk-šum-ibni was indeed a eunuch, as many take the label *ša rēši*, or *šūt rēši*, to imply.

At the beginning of Urtak's reign, there was peace between Assyria and Elam; by its end, there was open warfare. Ashurbanipal, as he himself tells us, was aggrieved at Urtak's abrogation of the peace between them. Assyria's goodwill toward the Elamites included help during a time of famine, but all of this the Elamites threw back in Ashurbanipal's face. Urtak himself was not to blame; it was the damnable eunuch, Marduk-šum-ibni, and his cohorts who incited Urtak "with lies" (*ina pirṣāte*) to attack Assyria: "The Elamite [i.e., Urtak], whose attack my heart never considered, Bel-iqiša of Gambulu, Nabu-šum-ereš, the governor of Nippur, my servants, [with] Marduk-šum-ibni, the *šūt rēši* of Urtak, they conspired among themselves to attack Sumer and Akkad, they incited him with lies."[22]

The annals do not disclose the particulars of these lies, and we do not have the Elamite account of why relations soured. But the particulars are beside the point; these could be supplied from a stock repertoire of character-types and causes that

were centuries old. The historical core of this conspiracy is difficult to ascertain from the Assyrian version alone, and in any event its historicity was subsumed to the ideological goals of the annals. The motif of the bribe—often effected by a treacherous *ša rēši*—runs through Neo-Assyrian annals describing soured relations with vassals or enemies. Assyrian annals contain many literary elements in their own right, and such a characterization of Assyria's enemies is also stereotypical, again, regardless of its historicity.[23] And this motif was by no means confined to the Neo-Assyrian period. Near Eastern tradition thus offered Ctesias a well-established and popular model, and he put a Greek veneer on it. Ashurbanipal's aspersions on Marduk-šum-ibni would fit perfectly in the milieu of Ctesias' *Persica*: a eunuch's perfidious influence on King Urtak brings both to a bad end. And, as the previous discussion has emphasized, whether or not Marduk-šum-ibni was a literal eunuch, a castrato, is impossible to say.

Some categorization of the *Persica*'s data is in order before we look at specific cases. In the following section I distinguish two registers for the treatment of eunuchs in the *Persica*. Eunuchs are listed in roughly chronological order, with some overlap between the categories. The first register contains eunuchs identified by name, with a brief summary of the narrative context in which they occur. The second lists eunuchs mentioned in the *Persica* for whom no names are provided. Entries are numbered to facilitate cross-referencing. Generally, if more than one eunuch is mentioned in the same paragraph or sequence, a combined entry is used.[24] Although it is impossible to determine whether any particular individual in the list was a eunuch in the literal sense of a castrato, that determination is not significant for this element of the discussion. What is significant is that Ctesias identified the individual as a eunuch.

Eunuchs Identified by Name in the *Persica*

Names are italicized at first reference. Passages are cited by fragment number.

The eunuch *Satibaras* (no. 1) plotted with the sons of Onnes against Semiramis (and Ninyas), in the version preserved by Nicolaus of Damascus (F1lδ*). In Diodorus, it was Ninyas who conspired against Semiramis, abetted by "some eunuch" (εὐνούχου τινὸς)—no name given (F1b).

The eunuch *Sparameizes*[25] (no. 2) was bribed by Arbakes to gain access to Sardanapalus. The fragment in Athenaeus provides the name (F1pα); neither Diodorus Siculus (F1b) nor Nicolaus (F1pε*) gave the eunuch's name when relating the same story.

The eunuch *Mitraphernes* (no. 3) intervened on behalf of Nanaros to forestall both Artaios' and Parsondes' wrath (F6b*, Nicolaus).[26]

The eunuch *Artembares* (no. 4), the supervisor of the cupbearers (οἰνοχόων ἐπεστάτει[27]), was the young Cyrus' patron at Astyages' court and his adoptive father (F8d* §7, Nicolaus).

The eunuch *Petesakas* (no. 5) plotted with Oibaras to abandon Astyages to his death. Cyrus subsequently dispatched Petesakas to retrieve Astyages' body—miraculously unspoiled and guarded by lions—and Petesakas was later horribly punished by Amytis for his part in the plot (F9 §6, Photius; F9a, Tzetzes).[28]

The eunuch *Bagapates* (no. 6) escorted Cyrus' body for burial. He is described as having become Cyrus' most influential eunuch after Petesakas' death, and Bagapates' influence continued (see below). Cambyses' influential eunuchs were Bagapates, *Izabates* (no. 7), and *Aspadates* (no. 8) (F13 §9, Photius).

The eunuch *Kombaphis* (no. 9), influential with the Egyptian king, went over to Cambyses and enabled the Persian victory.[29] Kombaphis is described as Izabates' cousin (F13 §10, Photius).

After Tanyoxarkes' murder by Cambyses and his replacement by the Magus (Sphendadates[30]), only Artasyras (the governor of Hyrcania[31]) and the eunuchs Bagapates and Izabates knew the secret. Even *Labyxos* (no. 10), the most influential of Tanyoxarkes' eunuchs, did not discern the impostor. Five years after Tanyoxarkes' murder, the eunuch *Tibethis* (no. 11), after a flogging by Sphendadates, revealed the truth of the Magus' identity to Amytis (F13 §13, Photius).

The eunuch *Natakas* (no. 12) was most influential with Xerxes. After Megabyzus refused to pillage Delphi, Xerxes dispatched the eunuch "Matakas" (a variant of "Natakas"[32]) to do so (F13 §24, §31, Photius).

Artabanus, son of Artasyras (see above), and the eunuch *Aspamitres* (*Mithradates*, no. 13)[33] plotted to kill Xerxes, and they framed Xerxes' son Darius for the murder. It was Artabanus who led Darius before Artaxerxes I, and Darius too was slain.[34] Artabanus also plotted, along with Megabyzus, against Artaxerxes I. After Megabyzus betrayed the plot, Artabanus was killed. The eunuch Aspamitres was also killed for his part in the murders of Xerxes and Darius, the details of which came to light at that time (F13 §33–34, Photius; F13b, Aelian; see also chapter 4 in this volume).

Artoxares (no. 14), the Paphlagonian eunuch, interceded, along with several others, to reconcile Megabyzus with Artaxerxes I after the former's revolt.[35] The detail that Artoxares was twenty years old at the time is also provided. He was later banished to Armenia for openly speaking on behalf of Megabyzus, himself banished because he killed a lion before the King during a hunt (F14 §42–43, Photius).

Bagorazos (no. 15) conveyed the bodies of Artaxerxes I and his queen Damaspia to Persis, as well as that of Xerxes II. Sogdianus plotted with the eunuch *Pharnakyas*

(no. 16) to kill Xerxes II. Pharnakyas was influential with Xerxes II, as were Bagorazos, Menostanes, "and some others" who are not identified by name.[36] Pharnakyas was stoned to death after the failed revolt of Arsites (Darius II's brother) and Artyphius, son of Megabyzus (F15 §47–48, §52, Photius).

The eunuch Artoxares (no. 14) came from Armenia to crown Ochus (thereafter Darius II), in conjunction with Arbarios, the cavalry commander of Sogdianus (Sekyndianos[37]), and Arxanes, the satrap of Egypt. Under Darius II, three eunuchs were influential: Artoxares was the foremost, *Artibarzanes* (no. 17) the second, and *Athōos* (no. 18) the third (F15 §50–51, §54, Photius).

The eunuch *Satibarzanes* (no. 19) accused Orondes of an affair with Parysatis (F15 §60, Photius). Orondes was put to death, and Parysatis was enraged, but no negative consequences are mentioned for Satibarzanes. Satibarzanes is mentioned again in the context of receiving gifts from Evagoras on behalf of the King.[38] F16 §60 (Photius), F20 (Plutarch), and F30 §73 (Photius).

The most trusted of Cyrus the Younger's eunuchs, *Parsikas* (no. 20), along with several other eunuchs whose names are not given (see below, no. 31), lamented over Cyrus' dead body at Cunaxa[39] (F20, Plutarch).

At a feast attended by several eunuchs of both the King and Parysatis, Parysatis' chief eunuch, *Sparamizes* (no. 21; cf. no. 2 above, Sparameizes), baited Mithradates to admit that he (Mithradates) struck the killing blow against Cyrus the Younger. Sparamizes then reported this to Parysatis, and Mithradates met a bad end (F26, Plutarch).

Bagapates (Masabates, no. 22)—distinct from no. 6—a eunuch who cut off Cyrus' hands, was won by Parysatis from Artaxerxes II through trickery in a dice game, so that she could take vengeance on the eunuch for his part in Cyrus' death. Photius does not label Bagapates a eunuch (F16 §66). Plutarch labels him a "eunuch of the King" but names him Masabates (F26).[40]

Unidentified Eunuchs

Numeration continues from the previous section, whether eunuchs are referenced individually or as a group.

The Assyrian king Ninyas devoted himself to luxury, idleness, and pleasure within the palace, attended by eunuchs (no. 23) and concubines (F1b, Diodorus; F1n, Athenaeus).[41]

The Assyrian king Sardanapalus committed suicide by immolation in his palace, where he was entombed with his eunuchs (no. 24) and concubines (F1b, Diodorus; F1q, Athenaeus).[42]

A eunuch (no. 25) belonging to Sardanapalus escaped the burning palace, went to Belesys the Babylonian, and secretly told him about the treasure in the palace ruins (F1b, Diodorus).

Nanaros directed his eunuch (no. 26) who was entrusted with the singing girls to feminize Parsondes in both appearance and voice. After seven years Parsondes persuaded another eunuch (no. 27), who had been whipped and abused by Nanaros, to deliver a message about Parsondes' predicament to King Artaios (F6b* §4, Nicolaus).

Stryangaios confessed his love for Zarinaia to the most trustworthy of his eunuchs (no. 28), who encouraged him to declare his love to her (F8c*, Nicolaus).[43]

Cyrus persuaded the most trustworthy of Astyages' eunuchs (no. 29) to ask Astyages for permission for Cyrus to depart. Shortly thereafter, another eunuch (no. 30) granted an audience with Astyages to a Babylonian who delivered news of a seer's dream indicating that Cyrus would become king (F8d* §22–25, Nicolaus).

A number of indistinguishable eunuchs occur in the sources for Artaxerxes II's reign. The wounded Cyrus the Younger is helped on the battlefield of Cunaxa by some eunuchs who were nearby (no. 31; also see the description of Parsikas, no. 20).[44] In response to the poisoning of Stateira, Artaxerxes II ordered the arrest and torture of the eunuchs (no. 32) of his mother, Parysatis. Parysatis' eunuchs (no. 33, although it is unclear whether they were the same individuals or not) secretly planted date palms around the tomb of Clearchus (F27 §71, Photius).

Thematic Registers

In the following, eunuchs from the preceding registers are matched with some of the main qualities that each manifests in the *Persica*. The thematic register, like the catalogues, is not an exhaustive list, since eunuchs in the *Persica* operate on many different levels at once. The aim of this categorization is to frame potential lines of further inquiry around prominent themes. The listings are fluid, as several cases cross categories and overlap, but that is to be expected of liminal figures. For example, the distinction between an "influential" eunuch and a "faithful" one may seem insignificant, until one described as both betrays his master—and thus becomes eligible for the "conniving" register as well. Eunuchs often manifest opposite qualities or move from one category to another. As noted above, whether all of these individuals were castrati is not at issue, apart from a few instances where discussion is mainly confined to the endnotes. What is most important is how Ctesias, or his transmitters, labeled them.

The Influential Eunuch

The following list contains only those eunuchs who are explicitly described as holding influential positions with their masters or who may be inferred to hold such positions. The list could be extended by implication from the *Persica*.[45] For context, see the preceding registers of named and unidentified eunuchs.

Mitraphernes (with Artaios), no. 3
Petesakas (with Cyrus), no. 5
Bagapates (with Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius), no. 6
Izabates and Aspadates (with Cambyses), nos. 7–8
Kombaphis (with the Egyptian king), no. 9
Labyxos (with Tanyoxarkes), no. 10
Natakas (with Xerxes I), no. 12
Artoxares, Artibarzanes, and Athōos (with Darius II), nos. 14, 17–18
Pharnakyas (with Xerxes II), no. 16

The Eunuch with Access or the One Who Intercedes

Sparameizes (to Sardanapalus on behalf of Arbakes), no. 2
Mitraphernes (before Artaios on behalf of Nanaros), no. 3
Artembares (to Astyages on behalf of Cyrus), no. 4
Bagapates (to the Magus), no. 6
Aspamitres/Mithradates (allowed Artabanus entry to kill Xerxes I), no. 13
Artoxares (before Artaxerxes I on behalf of Megabyzus), no. 14
Satibarzanes (to Artaxerxes II), no. 19
Astyages' eunuch, name not given (before Astyages on behalf of Cyrus), no. 29
Astyages' eunuch, name not given (to Astyages), no. 30

The Conniving Eunuch: Intrigue and Treachery

In the following list, no distinction is made between eunuchs acting as agent or merely serving as instrument.

Satibaras (against Semiramis), no. 1
Petesakas (against Astyages, at the instigation of Oibaras), no. 5
Bagapates (against Cambyses and against the Magus), no. 6

Izabates (against the Magus), no. 7
Kombaphis (against the Egyptian king), no. 9
Tibethis (against the Magus), no. 11
Aspamitres (against Xerxes I), no. 13
Artoxares (against Darius II), no. 14
Pharnakyas (against Xerxes II), no. 16
Satibarzanes (against Parysatis), no. 19
Sparamizes (against Mithradates), no. 21
Sardanapalus' eunuch (defected to Belesys), no. 25
Nanaros' eunuch (feminized Parsondes), no. 26
Nanaros' eunuch (was flogged; delivered a message to Artaios for Parsondes), no. 27
Parysatis' eunuchs (were tortured for information in the poisoning of Stateira[46]; secretly [κρύφα] planted palms around Clearchus' tomb), nos. 32–33

The Faithful Eunuch

This list of faithful eunuchs includes those who served as surrogates or confidants. It does not imply the eunuch's individual choice.

Artembares (loyal to Cyrus), no. 4
Bagapates (loyal to Cyrus and Darius), no. 6
Izabates (loyal to Cambyses), no. 7
Bagorazos (loyal to Artaxerxes I, Damaspia, and Xerxes II),[47] no. 15
Satibarzanes (loyal to Artaxerxes II), no. 19
Parsikas and other eunuchs (loyal to Cyrus the Younger at Cunaxa), nos. 20, 31
Bagapates (loyal to Artaxerxes II), no. 22
Sardanapalus' eunuchs (immolated in the palace), no. 24[48]
Stryangaios' eunuch, no. 28

The Eunuch between Life and Death

See the commentary below for discussion on this category. There is no distinction made whether the eunuch's role had a positive or negative association.

Petesakas (Astyages), no. 5
Bagapates (Cyrus and Darius), no. 6

Izabates (Cambyses), no. 7
Bagorazos (Artaxerxes I, Damaspia, and Xerxes II), no. 15
Parsikas and Cyrus the Younger's other eunuchs (at Cunaxa), nos. 20, 31
Sardanapalus' eunuchs (immolated in the palace), no. 24

Commentary on the Thematic Registers

Influence

The "influential" eunuch is the least compelling of the interpretive categories for two reasons in particular. First, with the exception of Mitraphernes (no. 3, whose story is preserved via Diodorus), all the other eunuchs explicitly labeled as influential occur only in Photius' epitome. In the extant text, this motif—or at least this specific descriptor—is almost exclusive to Photius: his way of summarizing the important characters, as he saw them. One may assume that in the original work, Ctesias had much more to say about these influential eunuchs, material that was in the end incidental to Photius' purposes but would be invaluable to us.

Second, in the literary context of the *Persica*, any eunuch mentioned by name may be interpreted as "influential," simply because each played an integral role in the preserved narrative. As a counterpoint, one may fairly wonder how "influential" (or, at least, perceptive) Tanyoxarkes' eunuch Labyxos (no. 10) truly was, if he could not detect the false Magus. But Labyxos' failure should be viewed as a plot device rather than a commentary on his perspicacity. "Influential" is stock phraseology and, of course, puts him in a position close to the royal principal, Tanyoxarkes, making Labyxos' testimony more credible.

Nanoros' flogged eunuch, whom Parsondes recruited to deliver a message about his predicament to Artaios, may or may not have been significant within the hierarchy of Nanaros' court eunuchs. But for purposes of plot, that eunuch was indeed significant, playing an integral (in other words, influential) role in Parsondes' eventual release. Within the literary narrative, the influential eunuch is a necessary starting point, from which the eunuch may move in between the other themes.

Access

Access is the in-between, and the eunuch is access. The eunuch's liminal position bridges the gaps: between the inaccessible king and his subjects, between the inner quarters (harem) and the outer court. But from the perspective of plot, were eunuchs necessary to the action? Were they included to satisfy the expectations of a fourth-century Greek audience with a growing familiarity with the Persian

court—even if that familiarity was based on stereotypes and literary topoi? They certainly offer an entertaining, even titillating, element. Or were they Ctesias' own literary device? In the narrative action of the *Persica*, even in its transmitted form, the eunuch has become a necessary component.

Arbakes' rebellion against Sardanapalus, and the overthrow of the tyrant, stem from Arbakes' entry into Sardanapalus' inner court, a feat that could not be accomplished without the eunuch Sparameizes (no. 2).[49] Similarly, a eunuch (no. 29) spurred Astyages to grant Cyrus' release at a critical juncture, setting Cyrus on the path of his destiny: rebellion and then dominion. Though we lack the end of the story, Mitraphernes' (no. 3) intercession with Artaios saved Nanaros' life, at least in the short term. That Sardanapalus and Nanaros, and the eunuchs who served them—who had to be bribed to deliver access—are not sympathetic characters is beside the point. Artoxares (no. 14) interceded on Megabyzus' behalf, and though the context differs from the previous examples, the parallel is evident. In the in-between, the eunuchs highlight the ambiguity of the surrounding characters, their motives, and their actions. In rare instances they become sympathetic characters in their own right, or at least the type of character with whom one empathizes (e.g., Artembares [no. 4] and perhaps Artoxares [no. 14], on whom see below). The amorphous Bagapates (no. 6) and Aspamitres (no. 13) enabled Darius and Artabanus to kill the Magus and Xerxes I respectively, and the parallelism between these and other eunuchs who may be paired (e.g., Mitraphernes and Artoxares) invited the reader to compare not only the eunuchs involved but also the assassinated kings. Of course, the constraints imposed by the truncated version of *Persica* available now preclude such developed comparisons in modern times.

In the Artembares (no. 4) story, which is really the story of Cyrus' rise, the access motif manifests in the empathic relationship between Artembares and Cyrus. Nicolaus' excerpt is our main source for this version and is one of the longest extant excerpts from the *Persica* (see chapter 3 in this volume). Destined for greatness, the young Cyrus navigated—not without difficulty—through the complex hierarchy of the domestic staff of Astyages' court (few of whom are labeled explicitly as eunuchs in Nicolaus' account). Eventually he became the protégé of the influential eunuch Artembares, the royal cupbearer, who shepherded him through the last stage of his youthful journey: the all-important access to Asytages. Thanks to the eunuch's patronage, Cyrus accumulated power and influence until he took Artembares' place on the latter's death and inherited his estate as his adopted son.

Faithful or Treacherous (and Occasionally Both)

The treacherous eunuch is a more representative type than the loyal eunuch.[50] A eunuch (no. 26) was tasked with transforming the hero Parsondes as part of

Nanaros' elaborate plot, but it was through the treachery of a eunuch (no. 27) that Parsondes was able to get a message to the king to secure his release. Mitraphernes (no. 3) then intervened to forestall Parsondes' vengeance on Nanaros. One suspects that his intervention did not end the plots and subterfuges in this story (see chapter 4 in this volume), but the incomplete ending leaves the modern reader uncertain of the outcome.

Consider another example. Why was the eunuch Petesakas (no. 5) necessary to implement Oibaras' scheme to kill Astyages? Earlier in the narrative Oibaras had demonstrated time and again his resourcefulness, initiative, and willingness to act alone.[51] The eunuch's participation emphasizes the secret and treacherous nature of the plot, one that involved a king and carried grave consequences for both principals. Before Petesakas' involvement came to light, he performed an important job, the necessary role for a eunuch, the conveyance of dead king to his resting place (see below). The *Persica*'s presentation of treacherous eunuchs goes beyond an unimaginative reliance on a stock trope, even if that is the impression one gets from reading Photius' terse references to Kombaphis (no. 9), Aspamitres (no. 13), and Pharnakyas (no. 16).

The same eunuch might sometimes manifest both loyal and treacherous behavior. The cases of Bagapates (no. 6) and Izabates (no. 7) are particularly notable for this aspect of the in-between. Faithful to Cyrus, Bagapates had become the most powerful eunuch after the death of Petesakas (no. 5). Bagapates was tasked with conveying Cyrus' body back to Persis—historically, Cyrus' tomb at his capital of Pasargadae. Bagapates' influence then transferred to Cyrus' successor Cambyses. But his loyalty transferred not so much in the end, when Bagapates schemed with the Hyrcanian governor Artasyras to allow the Magus Sphendadates to seize power. It was Bagapates' colleague, Izabates, who proved most loyal to Cambyses. Izabates delivered Cambyses' body to its resting place in Persis. When he returned and discovered the conspiracy, he exposed the Magus but was then captured and beheaded. No word is extant on whether Bagapates or Artasyras were similarly revealed.

Why did Bagapates turn on the Magus, on whose behalf he had schemed to supplant Cambyses? Did he never fully transfer his loyalty from Cyrus, even if he did transfer his influence? If not, why not? Did Cambyses' murder of Tanyoxarkes somehow turn the eunuch against him? But then why support the Magus? It is not surprising that this dynastic and, ultimately, empire-wide crisis inverted so much and with such dramatic consequences: secret fratricide, the mother's discovery and suicide, the king's accidental (?) death, the impostor's undetected ascension, and Darius' coup putting things to rights. This also made for a great story, told with vastly diverging details not only by Ctesias but also by his predecessor Herodotus and by Darius himself.

Whether the original *Persica* described the full sequence is unknown, but at some point Bagapates must have developed misgivings about the Magus Sphendadates. It was Bagapates, since he held the keys to the palace, who admitted the Seven conspirators and thus facilitated the killing of the Magus and—from the perspective of Darius I's apologia at Bisitun—allowed a legitimate king to take the throne once more. Finally, Ctesias noted that Bagapates guarded (or maintained) Darius' tomb for seven years before he himself died.[52] That particular aspect of the eunuch's association with the King's burial will be discussed below.

Bagapates remained influential with four kings, if we include the Magus. The two who came to a bad end—Cambyses and the Magus—were generally reviled in the wider ancient literature and associated with many horrible deeds. Conversely, Cyrus and Darius (especially the former, with some ambiguity regarding the latter) generally received good press and—as portrayed by the Greek tradition—were the most important and most successful of the Persian kings. It is noteworthy (unless we attribute the absence of evidence to Ctesias' transmitters) that neither Cyrus nor Darius is said to have been overthrown or betrayed with eunuch involvement. In the surviving *Persica*, they are the only two Persian kings who are not caught up in such intrigues against their own security.

Artoxares (no. 14) offers a similar example of loyalty turned to treachery. This is simultaneously the most humorous and the most perplexing of Ctesias' eunuch stories. Its interpretation is anything but straightforward. Artoxares was a prominent figure even in Photius' epitome, but this may be a reflection of the prominence of Megabyzus, with whom Artoxares was, at least initially, closely linked. But Artoxares does not fit the typical profile for a domestic eunuch. He is identified by his ethnicity (Paphlagonian, but see n. 35) and his youth (twenty years old), details generally not provided for other eunuchs in the extant *Persica*. Artoxares interceded to reconcile Megabyzus with Artaxerxes I, after the former had revolted. Sometime later—the length of the interval is not provided—the same Megabyzus was banished after killing a lion before the King on a hunt. Artoxares was likewise banished, to Armenia, for speaking on Megabyzus' behalf.

In the tumult after Artaxerxes I's death and the murder of his son and successor Xerxes II, Artoxares is noted with only two others as primary supporters of Ochus, the contender who became Darius II. Artoxares returned from exile in Armenia—presumably not alone, but rather at the head of an army—and aided Ochus, along with Arbaios, the cavalry commander of Sogdianus, and Arxanes, the satrap of Egypt. Clearly, Artoxares' power and influence went beyond what a typical court eunuch, even a "most influential" one, would have wielded; otherwise, it is difficult to see how his return from Armenia would have warranted mention in the same context as Sogdianus and Arxanes, who also held high military positions. But

Assyrian records, as discussed previously, show *ša rēši* officials holding military commands, so hasty judgments should be avoided. Artoxares represents a paradigmatic case of uncertainty. Was he really a castrato? Ctesias' evident confusion or conflation of the broadly applied honorific *ša rēši* and its equivalents, granted to Artoxares and others as a court title, continues to stymie.

Ctesias' story now takes an interesting turn. At an unspecified later time, Artoxares planned to overthrow Darius II and take the kingship for himself. It is best to quote Ctesias himself (F15 §54, via Photius) for the truncated story: "Artoxares the eunuch, who was very influential with the king, schemed for the kingship, thinking that he himself should rule. He ordered a woman to prepare him a false beard and moustache, in order to appear as a man. But he was betrayed by her. He was seized, given over to Parysatis, and put to death."[53]

This anecdote raises all sorts of questions, and one hardly knows where to start. Artoxares' request for a beard has raised many modern eyebrows. The implication is that he, as a eunuch, could not have grown one. But like their Near Eastern predecessors, the Persian kings in full regalia wore false beards. E. Frahm observes that the idealized portraits of Assyrian kings on palace reliefs portray them all with full ceremonial beards—not because they looked identical in reality, but rather because the portrayed ideal projected "an ageless state of dignity and detachment" (2014, 172).[54] The same applied to high officials, especially in formal ceremonies requiring full regalia. It may be wondered if the beardless Artoxares was in fact the Persian equivalent of a *ša ziqni* official, a high-ranking functionary who needed to don a false beard for his courtly responsibilities, or if Artoxares chose that type of official costume for his disguise in order to get closer to the king and remain unidentified. In either, admittedly speculative, case, his identification as a eunuch may be simply attributable to a Ctesian conflation. This kind of over-the-top pageantry would have provided significant fodder for Ctesias' reimaginings for a Greek audience.

Some commentators on the passage above translate "a woman" as "his wife." This is problematic. A eunuch is understood not to have a family, apart from his palace/royal "family" (see above), and at least not a wife; in any case, the woman in question betrayed him.[55] This is quite a fall from prominence for someone who was one of the king-makers for the very king he purportedly planned to overthrow. The final act is also curious: Artoxares was handed over to Parysatis. Why? Rebels would generally not be left to the queen to punish. That was a job for the king—though that rule need not apply in Ctesias' world. Ctesias (or Photius) may have wished to emphasize the domestic component, with the implication that this episode never left the inner court, and that Parysatis dealt with it. The story gives the impression of a good fiction, or a severely condensed allusion to a single, sensationalized detail from an actual revolt.

Life and Death and the Eunuch In-between

Six of the thirty-three eunuchs in the catalogue above were involved in some way with the transition between life and death, mainly through the official role of conveying the deceased king's body to his tomb. In the *Persica*, it seems that a eunuch was necessary for this function. The motif is consistent across several transmitters, which leads to the conclusion that Ctesias employed it as a literary device. A eunuch accompanied the dead kings Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, Artaxerxes I, and Xerxes II. The Magus impostor, Sphendadates, may have been a special case for whom the pattern did not apply, but it is assumed here that the lack of similar anecdotes involving the burials of Xerxes I and Darius II is due to the vicissitudes of the *Persica*'s transmission.

One hesitates to read too much into a brief allusion to the human sacrifice of Sardanapalus' concubines and eunuchs (no. 24) in the palace during the ruler's suicide by immolation. As a number of commentators have noted, this story harks back to the sack of Babylon in 648 at the end of the war between two brothers: Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria, and his brother Shamash-shum-ukin, King of Babylon. At the end of his rebellion, Shamash-shum-ukin died in the burning of the palace. Both kings served as models for the Sardanapalus of Greek tradition, even if only echoes of their confrontation were transmitted.[56] Sardanapalus' eunuchs literally accompany the king on the journey between life and death, which distinguishes them from the eunuchs in the following examples.

Near Eastern evidence provides no explicit rendering of eunuch involvement in royal burial—even if we could be sure we were translating the terms correctly. The evidence rather points to the preparations and behaviors of the principals (i.e., the succeeding king, royal family, occasionally high officials[57]), rather than particulars of any involvement by the palace staff. There are various allusions to bodies laid out for funerary rites. Ashurbanipal's officers, once they captured the elusive Chaldean rebel Nabu-bel-shumati in Elam, sent his corpse to Assyria packed in salt.[58]

A document published by J. MacGinnis (K 7856 + K 6323) gives details of the funerary rites of a dead Assyrian king (it is uncertain which one) and the grave goods: a variety of textiles, jewelry, and slaughtered animals. Whether these were for the king's own use in the afterlife or gifts for the gods, or both, is not clear. The document reads like a cross between a literary text and a bureaucratic list. A specific reference to the body's being placed in oil (immersed or anointed?) finds a direct echo in Ctesias and other Classical writers.[59] The much discussed passage in which Ctesias described Xerxes' violation of a tomb in Babylon mentioned a sarcophagus that contained explicit warning about opening it and keeping it filled with oil.

The story is preserved both by Aelian (tomb of Belos, F13b) and by Photius' epitome (tomb of Belitanas, F13 §26). In both versions of the story, Xerxes' hubris in disturbing the tomb and his inability to keep the sarcophagus filled with oil were ominous of his bad end, variously attributed to a Babylonian revolt, defeat during the expedition against Greece, or assassination by his own son. This is a charming tale, but its interest here is mainly that it shows that Ctesias had a Near Eastern antecedent for some of the particulars of his story—the use of oil for the burial rites—regardless of his own confusion or creativity.

Ctesias may be on firmer ground when we consider evidence from the Achaemenid period, but the question overlaps issues of who these eunuchs were, what functions they could have held in the royal or palace hierarchy, and the confusion and conflation of administrative titles discussed previously. Without recapitulating that entire discussion, we can note that the Babylonian title *ustarbaru* (often translated as "chamberlain") continued in use during the Achaemenid period, applied to the holder of a high office and used as an honorific. The title could be held with other titles and honorifics simultaneously, and it has been shown to have replaced the title *ša rēši* in some contexts in the later fifth century, near Ctesias' floruit.[60] The Elamite equivalent of the epithet, *lipte kuktir*, appears in various contexts in the corpus of Persepolis Fortification Tablets. One document in particular (NN 1848) connects individuals holding this title with a *šumar* (a tomb, perhaps of Cambyses) in a supervisory role, "[the ones] who are keepers of the *šumar*" (lines 8–9).[61] It is not a stretch to suggest that Ctesias' eunuchs, to be identified rather as men bearing honorifics and high status, were closely involved in the royal burial and funerary rites, whether they were castrati or not.

Further, Elamite *lipte kuktir* has been shown to be the equivalent of Old Persian *vaçabara*, a word translated literally as "garment-bearer." It is a title clearly associated with those of high status in formal circumstances. In other words, it was an honorific that approximates the modern title "chamberlain," which brings us full circle—but not circularly—to the *ustarbaru*. If there was any continuity from Assyrian to Persian practices in royal burial—as there was in so much else regarding royal ideology and practice—the Persian "garment-bearer" may be associated with the large quantities of textiles buried with the Assyrian king in the text discussed above, K 7856 + 6323. Based on parallel circumstances and contexts, the various titles applied in the Achaemenid period might, hypothetically, be graphed as follows:

Akkadian *ša rēši* → Akkadian *ustarbaru* = Elamite *lipte kuktir* = Old Persian *vaçabara*

The Elamite–Old Persian equivalency is confirmed in an inscription at the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-i Rustam (fig. 4). One of the retainers portrayed, Aspathines,

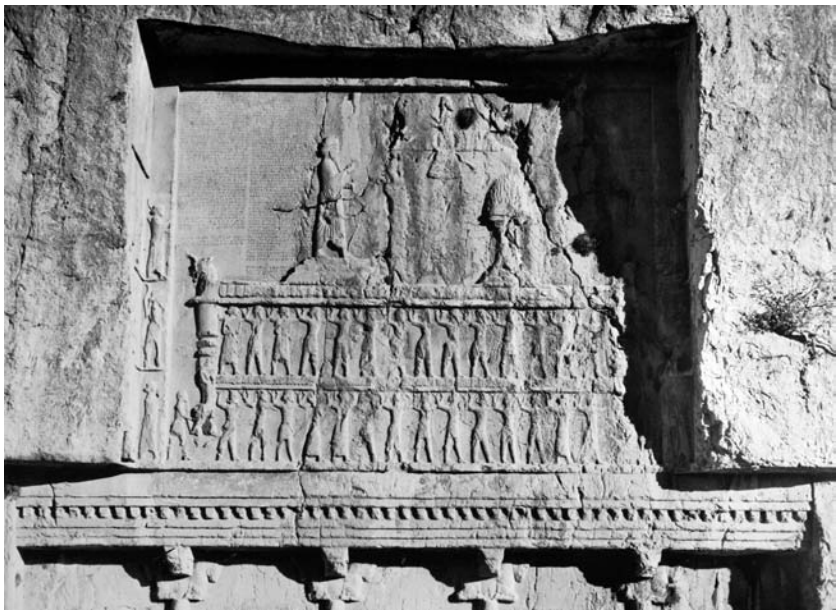

Figure 4 (*above*). Tomb of Darius I, Naqsh-i Rustam, top register. From E. Schmitt 1970, plate 19. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

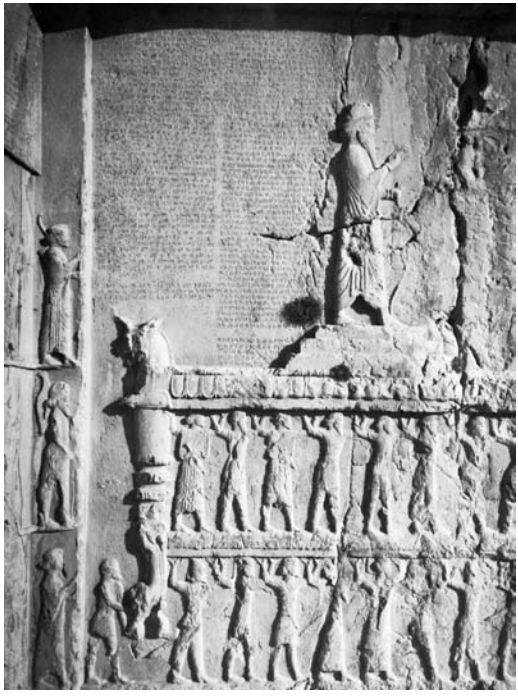

Figure 5 (*right*). Attendants of Darius I, including Aspathines—middle figure, vertical left row. Tomb of Darius I, Naqsh-i Rustam, top register. From E. Schmitt 1970, plate 22a. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

is labeled in Elamite as *lipte kuktir* and in Old Persian as *vaçabara* (fig. 5). The Babylonian version has gaps, and the correlative word is not extant.

> Elamite: ^{v}*Ašbazana lipte kuktira* ^{v}*Dariyamuš* ^{v}EŠŠANA *aptē marriš*
> Old Persian: *Aspacanā vaçabara Dārayavahauš xšāyaθiyahyā isuvām dārayati*
> Translation: Aspathines, the garment-bearer, holds King Darius' bow case.[62]

In Aspathines, who warranted an immortal place on Darius I's tomb, we have one of the highest-ranking Persian nobles on record. Aspathines and the other figure are carrying not cloth or garments but ceremonial weapons, a circumstance reinforcing the epithet's honorific nature. Aspathines is known from Herodotus (3.70, 3.78) as one of Darius' co-conspirators and also from both the Persepolis Fortification Archive and the Persepolis Treasury Archive, where two of his seals are extant: PFS 1567* and PTS 14*. The particulars of his career and the evidence for him are discussed in a number of publications.[63] Let it suffice here to emphasize that Aspathines was not some errand boy shuttling cloth between palace rooms but a high-ranking member of the court. Any literal connection to "garment bearing" would have involved ceremonial contexts fraught with high symbolism. If we apply this example to the *Persica*, it is sensible to assume that Ctesias conflated actual Persian practices—or, rather, confused Persian court titles (whether they were in fact Persian, Elamite, or Akkadian in origin) and functions that were associated with burial customs and associated rituals. Whether he did this intentionally or not, and whether he conflated (or misidentified) actual eunuchs and non-eunuchs, is unclear. At this stage, with present evidence, there is little hope of differentiating eunuchs and non-eunuchs based simply on the title a man held in Akkadian or Elamite sources.

Thus, when Bagapates accompanied Cyrus to his resting place, or "sat by" (παρακαθίσας) Darius' tomb for seven years before his own death, it is easy to understand this as a conflation or creation based on an echo of the original. More interesting, or problematic, from the literary perspective is Petesakas' (no. 5) conveyance of Astyages to his resting place, since he was involved in that king's assassination. Petesakas is described as influential with Cyrus, not Astyages, but the truncated account does not allow us to know his origins. Did Cyrus, as one may assume is implied in the *Persica*'s narrative, inherit the Median court apparatus, including Astyages' personnel? One would assume so from the logical progression of the story: Cyrus did marry Astyages' daughter Amytis in that account (see chapter 3 in this volume). While Cyrus' right-hand man Oibaras was the driving force behind Astyages murder,[64] Petesakas was a curious choice to convey Astyages' dead body. The other eunuchs associated with this motif had no

direct role in the deaths of those kings whose bodies they moved between life and death.

Others on the list are straightforward: Izabates (no. 7) bearing Cambyses to his resting place, true to Cambyses' memory in denouncing the Magus; Bagorazos (no. 15) bearing Artaxerxes I and Damaspia (and Xerxes II); and the forlorn Parsikas (no. 20) on the field of Cunaxa by the dead Cyrus. These eunuchs represent, less problematically than Petesakas, the nexus of the eunuch in-between life and death. The motif recurs in the *Persica*, and it is not a coincidence that the eunuchs bear the real and symbolic responsibility of transferring the king from life to death. That responsibility stems from a motif that is associated with but goes well beyond the standard motif of the eunuch's influence on or accessibility to the king (or, in Parsikas' case, the prince, Cyrus). This function represents the ultimate expression of the eunuch's liminal, in-between status.

Excursus: Note on the Name of Hermotimus (Hdt. 8.104–106)

One unknown part of the equation is the extent to which Ctesias is tapping into Greek traditions about eunuchs—or at least eunuchs at the Persian court. The sample is small. The eunuch is clearly not a new phenomenon in Greek literature, but he was unheard of in the literature of the Archaic period. Eunuchs are mentioned several times in Herodotus, not only at 8.104–106 but also, for example, at 1.117, 3.4, 3.92, and 7.187. They are not a consistently recurring element, but the Persian court is not a focus in Herodotus. Thucydides is not the least bit concerned with such creatures. Eunuchs are prominent in the writings of Xenophon, but his work postdates Ctesias' *Persica*. If there are questions of influence, these would be of Ctesias' influence on Xenophon.

Herodotus' Hermotimus, made a eunuch as prisoner of war by Panionius of Chios, was from Pedasa in Caria (Hdt. 8.105). This episode and its wider context—for example, associations with the Pedasan priestess who grew a beard—are treated in detail and with extensive references by S. Hornblower (2003). One element of Hermotimus' story relevant to the preceding discussion concerns the etymology of his name. Was it derived from the god Hermes or from the Hermos River? Hornblower favors the latter etymology.[65] Given an underlying assumption that Ctesias' approach to eunuchs as emblematic of the in-between was not unique to him or his work, a derivation from Hermes' name seems much more attractive. Hermes' multiple functions as a go-between and boundary-crosser are well known.[66] A eunuch named for the glory of Hermes, the paradigmatic in-between, fits the motif.

2 Semiramis, Queen of Battle

Ctesias is one of our earliest sources for Semiramis, the legendary queen of Assyria. It is through the *Persica*, by way of Diodorus Siculus, that we possess the main elements of her legend.[1] Most accept, likewise here, that what Diodorus preserved follows the Ctesian original in plot and in the thematic motifs associated with the great queen. Discerning which specific elements of Diodorus' account came directly from Ctesias or were embellished by Diodorus is an intractable problem that has been engaged at some length (see the introduction to this book). There is no intention here to revisit the myriad problems of Diodorus *Quellenforschung*, although it is worth reiterating that the moralistic Diodorus may have trimmed, and perhaps sanitized, some of the more sensationalistic elements from the original *Persica*.[2]

It is frequently assumed that the Alexander historians' accounts influenced Diodorus' rendering of Semiramis' campaign against India. That is plausible enough, but Alexander's Indian expedition was not the first. Darius I campaigned against India sometime in the 510s—this is extrapolated from brief allusions in the sources[3]—and traditions from this expedition may have influenced a Ctesian original on which Diodorus relied. The question of embellishment might apply if Diodorus utilized other accounts to supplement Ctesias,' but it is not obvious that he did so. Whatever the case may be, when Ctesias is described as the author below, that should be understood to mean Ctesias as transmitted mainly by Diodorus. Other transmitters will be specifically noted.

Ctesias' main Greek antecedent for the Semiramis story is Herodotus' one-off reference to her at 1.184. This demonstrates that Ctesias was treating a figure who was known to the Greeks, though it is unclear how well developed the Semiramis story was within the Greek historiographic tradition. One ought to consider the possibility that Ctesias' Semiramis was an original: not the character herself, of course, but in the sense of her story as an extensive narrative developed for a Greek

audience. Herodotus' brief allusion to Semiramis is secondary to his greater emphasis on other warrior queens, such as Tomyris and Artemisia. The only other Assyrian queen whom Herodotus treats is Nitocris: also an idealized builder queen from the Assyrian and Babylonian traditions (compare the motif of the king as builder). Herodotus ostensibly linked Nitocris with the historical Adad-guppi, Nabonidus' mother, and Herodotus' abbreviated account appears to echo Median-Babylonian tensions during Nabonidus' reign (1.185).

Semiramis became the paradigmatic example of the warrior queen in Greek and subsequent western literature, and a simple keyword search reveals the multiplicity of literary and musical works with which her name is associated.[4] Semiramis' legends as preserved in Greek traditions have been traced through prominent Assyrian and Babylonian women such as Naqia (also called "Zakutu"), the wife of Sennacherib (r. 705–681) and mother of Esarhaddon (r. 681–669), as well as Nabonidus' mother, Adad-guppi. Semiramis' eponymous archetype is Sammu-ramat, the wife of Shamshi-Adad V (r. 824–811), mother of Adad-nerari III (r. 811–783), and daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser III (r. 859–824). Sammu-ramat is mentioned in various inscriptions and in a stele of her own, which preserve no details beyond her identification with the three kings listed.

Stele of Sammu-ramat—*RIMA* 3 A.0.104.2001 (Transliteration)[5]

1) ṣa-lam ^{f}sa-am-mu-ra-mat
2) MUNUS É.GA[L ša ^{m}šam]-ši ^{d}IŠKUR
3) MAN ŠÚ MAN ˹KUR˺ [^{d}a]-šur
4) MUNUS.AMA [ša ^{md}IŠ]KUR-ÉRIN.TÁḪ
5) MAN ŠÚ MAN K[UR] ^{d}a-šur
6) MUNUS kal-lat [^{md}šù]l-ma-nu-MAŠ
7) MAN kib-rat 4-ti

Stele of Sammu-ramat—*RIMA* 3 A.0.104.2001 (Translation)

> Monument of Sammu-ramat, Queen of Shamshi-Adad (V), King of the World, King of Assyria, mother of Adad-nerari (III), King of the World, King of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser (III), King of the Four Quarters.

Sammu-ramat also has a prominent place in an inscription of her son, Adad-nerari III. "When Ushpilulume, king of the Kummihites, caused Adad-nerari (III), King of Assyria, and Sammu-ramat, the Lady of the Palace, to cross the Euphrates . . . I (Adad-nerari) fought a pitched battle with them. . . . To save their lives

they dispersed."[6] This explicit reference to Sammu-ramat's accompanying her son Adad-nerari III on campaign has engendered much discussion in modern scholarship. It is tantalizing to see in this brief reference the origins of the warrior queen Semiramis, but no other details are extant in the contemporary sources. There is ample opportunity for speculation. Assyrian queens, of course, wielded a great deal of influence, but they are rarely named in monumental inscriptions. From her own stele and from her inclusion in her son's inscription as present on campaign, one may reasonably infer an outsized role for the queen Sammu-ramat. But was her presence on campaign unusual? It would be hazardous to assume that it was an anomaly. For example, much closer to (but postdating) Ctesias' own time, Darius III's royal entourage, on the campaign that resulted in the battle of Issus, included his wife and mother (Arrian, *Anab*. 2.11.9).

The Greek Semiramis is, of course, a composite literary figure, whatever historical reality may underpin her legends. It is on the literary components that this chapter focuses, especially those that dovetail with Mesopotamian thematic topoi. The epithet "Queen of Battle" in the chapter title connotes a specific, though certainly not exclusive, identification with the paradigmatic Mesopotamian ruler: Sargon of Akkad. Semiramis' royal attributes fix her firmly in the Mesopotamian tradition of kingship.

The obvious starting point for the Mesopotamian ideal of kingship is Sargon of Akkad, who reigned in the late twenty-fourth century BCE, almost a full two thousand years before Ctesias' time.[7] Stories about Sargon survived for centuries as didactic and entertaining tales for those kings that followed him, and the paradigmatic attributes he possessed were claimed by the very kings for whom he served as model.[8] His legacy became even more pronounced during the first millennium, especially in conjunction with the reigns of Sargon II of Assyria and his successors Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal, the so-called Sargonid kings of the later eighth through the mid-seventh centuries.

Mesopotamian kings enjoyed the patronage of Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love and war, and their relationship with her was central to their ideology. Semiramis embodied many of the masculine attributes central to kingship along with attributes of Ishtar herself. This dual nature was manifested in the Greek Semiramis legends not by a special relationship with a goddess but rather by Semiramis' own connections to divinity. She was the daughter of a goddess, one syncretized with Ishtar. Semiramis fascinated Ctesias and his audience because she flipped the type: she was a manifestation of extreme opposites, unexpected and in some ways unprecedented in the Greek tradition. Semiramis is the first figure exemplifying Ctesias' obvious interest in gender opposition and inversion. Others include Ninyas and Sardanapalus, the feminized Parsondes, Zarinaia, and the aggressive Median

and Persian queens: Amytis, Amestris, and Parysatis. Semiramis typifies Ctesias' synthesis of Mesopotamian and Greek literary traditions, with qualities associated both with the goddess and with the ideal king. Because Sargon's model was pervasive and enduring, relevant parallels may be made between Semiramis and a number of Assyrian and Babylonian kings. Sargon served as the paradigm, however, and since the Sargon legends lie at the core of Semiramis' story, he will be the primary focus in this comparison.

Legends of Semiramis

Semiramis' humble origins (ταπεινῆς τύχης, Diod. Sic. 2.4.1), juxtaposed with a miraculous birth, place her squarely in the tradition of the exposed infant who becomes a great king. This tradition, shared by a number of heroic figures in antiquity, is often called the "Sargon Legend" after the other principal of this chapter, Sargon of Akkad. Ctesias ascribed Semiramis' origins to Ashkelon in Syria. She was the daughter of a goddess named Derketo—another name for Atargatis, according to Strabo (16.4.27 [F1d]). Aphrodite afflicted Derketo with a burning passion for one of Derketo's own devotees, a young Syrian man. After satiating her lust, Derketo was ashamed; she killed the youth and exposed the infant Semiramis in a desolate and rocky area. Derketo then drowned herself in a lake and was transformed into a fish.[9] Semiramis survived, nursed by doves.[10] After a year in the wild, she was found by herdsmen, who delivered this wonder to Simmas, described in the text as προεστηκώτι, the man in charge of the king's cattle.[11]

As a young woman, Semiramis was discovered by Onnes, a prominent figure at the royal court, who had been appointed governor of Syria. Her great allure is described in somewhat periphrastic terms, but she was apparently more than just a pretty face.[12] Onnes became completely enslaved to her. He took her to wife, and she bore him two sons: Hyapates and Hydaspes. Onnes later summoned Semiramis while he was on campaign with King Ninos, during a protracted siege against the Bactrians. Semiramis made the journey alone, in a special garment. Upon arrival, thanks to her cleverness and tactical genius, she discerned the weak spot in the defenses of the city, Bactra, circumvented them, and thus facilitated the Assyrian victory. Ninos, amazed, rewarded her, and then he too became enamored of her. Compelled to relinquish Semiramis to the king, Onnes—in the madness of his rage and desire—hanged himself, and Semiramis became Ninos' queen. She bore a son to him named Ninyas.

Semiramis became sole ruler after Ninos' death, determined to surpass her husband's reputation. Her exploits read like a Hellenized rendering of the Assyrian

Figure 6. Edward Degas, *Semiramis and the Construction of Babylon*, begun 1861. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photograph: Alfredo Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

royal annals. In the Mesopotamian tradition of the proper ruler,[13] she undertook a number of building projects and campaigns, the first of which was the foundation of Babylon (fig. 6). Ctesias described the construction of the city, including its planning, materials, and building techniques, in great detail. Semiramis renovated the so-called temple of Zeus (i.e., that of Marduk, or Bel), which had fallen into disrepair. It had been extremely tall, a place from which the Chaldeans observed celestial phenomena. Ctesias is clearly describing a ziggurat, a locus not only of worship but also of scholarly (priestly) learning. Semiramis gathered artisans from all over for its construction (Diod. Sic. 2.7.2), just as Darius did when constructing his palace at Susa (DSf §7–13). The detailed description of three statues (Diod. Sic. 2.9.5–9)—Zeus, Hera, and Rhea—is not easily reconciled in Babylonian terms, though Marduk and his consort Sarpanitum (Zarpanitum) correspond with Zeus and Hera.[14] The identification of "Rhea" is less straightforward. Syncretism of deities throughout Babylonia offers various possibilities for an association of one male and two females, Ishtar usually being one of them.

Semiramis commissioned other building works in far-flung locales as memorials to her greatness. In Media, at Mount Bagistanus (Bisitun), she made an inscribed monument and at Chauon a major park, termed in Greek a *paradeisos*.[15] There she devoted herself to luxury, choosing the best-looking soldiers in her army, having sex with them, and then killing them.[16] She founded Ecbatana in Media. At a mountain called Zarcaeon (a Hellenized name for the Zagros Mountains), she

undertook another massive construction project that involved leveling mountains and filling in crags to build a road: both as a memorial and as a way to shorten her journeys in Media. At Mount Orontes near Ecbatana, exceptional for its height and ruggedness, she had a canal dug from the base to a large lake. Semiramis undertook similar construction projects throughout Asia, including Persis: "After she cut through mountains and sheer cliffs, she built expensive roads everywhere, and in the plains she raised mounds, sometimes preparing tombs for her commanders and sometimes establishing cities on the heights."[17] Excursions in Egypt and Ethiopia resulted in production of additional wonders.

The most extensive of Semiramis' military expeditions was against India and King Strabrobates. Its progression is preserved in some detail. To offset the advantage afforded by Strabrobates' elephants, Semiramis resorted to a stratagem of dummy elephants: straw-stuffed hides mounted upon camels, concealing men who manipulated and directed them (Diod. Sic. 2.16.9, 2.19.3). She won a great victory at the Indus River, after which Strabrobates withdrew his remaining forces across the Indus, hoping that Semiramis would follow. She did so, and in fierce fighting was herself wounded. She withdrew, with Strabrobates in pursuit, and cut a pontoon bridge while many of his forces were still on it. Strabrobates did not push his advantage, swayed by omens of potential disaster if he crossed the river.[18] Semiramis withdrew to Bactria after this defeat, and no further military campaigns are recorded. The story turns to her death, at the instigation of her son Ninyas and abetted by a eunuch (see chapter 1, no. 1). Semiramis learned of the plot, voluntarily ceded the kingdom to Ninyas, and then vanished, in some accounts having turned into a dove.

Legends of Sargon

Sargon of Akkad (fig. 7), founder of the Dynasty of Akkad (r. ca. 2340–2284 according to the Middle Chronology), is attested via his own royal inscriptions, those of his successors, and an extensive literary tradition: the *Sumerian King List*; texts describing his birth and rise to power; and several epic compositions about his exploits, such as the famous poem *Sargon, King of Battle*. Extant copies of these texts date from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Assyrian periods.[19] The literary works complement Sargon's royal inscriptions, the only contemporary sources available, though they operate at different levels and for different purposes. Sargon's own inscriptions tell us nothing of his life before he became king, but they provide important insights into Sargon's priorities in crafting his royal image.[20]

Figure 7. Head of Sargon of Akkad (?), from Nineveh. National Museum, Baghdad. Photograph: Scala / Art Resource, NY. See Westenholz 2004, 7–8, for the head's identification.

While the textual tradition about Sargon is quite rich, it is extremely sporadic, as the following examples illustrate. The *Sumerian Sargon Legend* is a literary composition that provides details of Sargon's rise to power at the expense of Urzababa of Kish and Lugalzagesi of Uruk. The only extant copy is from Nippur and is provisionally dated to the Old Babylonian period, but there is no way to know if this was a copy of an earlier tablet. The extant texts relaying the *Sargon Birth Legend*, a fixture in discussions of this ruler and of the motif of the infant exposed at birth, date to a millennium and a half after his reign. The earliest copy is from Ashurbanipal's library in seventh-century Nineveh; another tablet, containing part of the legend, is from Dilbat and dates to the subsequent Neo-Babylonian period. The copy thus dates to the time of the successors of Sargon II of Assyria, whose

choice of throne name directly linked him to the first Sargon. Coincidence or not, this fact raises a number of questions. Was the *Sargon Birth Legend* based on oral traditions—or a textual tradition for which we have no earlier exemplars—about the origins of the first Sargon? Or was it a creation of Sargon II, or one of his successors, intended to tap into a popular motif linked to Sargon of Akkad in order to heighten the prestige of Sargon II?

A synthesis of the main components of the Sargon stories establishes points of comparison with Semiramis. According to the *Sargon Birth Legend*, Sargon was born of an unknown father and a mother who was a priestess.[21] She bore Sargon in secret and placed him in a basket in the river. He was rescued by a certain Aqqi, described as a water-drawer, who raised Sargon and trained him as a gardener.[22] In such circumstances he came to the attention of Ishtar, whose favor was responsible for his ultimately becoming king. No details of his rise are supplied in that text, but they may be filled in from other parts of the literary tradition and Sargon's own inscriptions. Sargon rose high in the favor of Urzababa, King of Kish, and he became Urzababa's cupbearer, a post of high honor. The literary tradition portrays kingship in third-millennium Sumer as cyclical. When the time had come for Urzababa and Kish to recede, Sargon became king, and his new capital, Akkad, came to the fore. Conquests of neighboring city-states and, ultimately, his main rival—Lugalzagesi of Uruk—made Sargon ruler of Sumer.[23] Sargon's own inscriptions emphasize his subsequent campaigns outside Mesopotamia: Elam, Parahshum, Mari, Ebla, and elsewhere. His most famous campaign is preserved only in the literary tradition. *Sargon, King of Battle* frames his victory over the ruler of Purushhanda, a place usually located somewhere in central Anatolia, in terms of Sargon's persistence and perspicacity in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

The following list of motifs shows the principal points of comparison between Semiramis and Sargon of Akkad.

Semiramis	**Sargon of Akkad**
goddess mother (Derketo/Atargatis), mortal father	priestess mother, unknown father; favored by Ishtar
exposed as infant, nursed by doves	exposed as infant
discovered by herdsmen	discovered by Aqqi, the water-drawer
wife/advisor of Onnes, royal court	cupbearer of Urzababa, royal court

won favor of Ninos on campaign, married him, succeeded him after his death	conquered Sumer; became king
building works	building works
moving mountains	moving mountains
campaigns in all directions: e.g., Bactria, Armenia, Egypt, and India	campaigns in all directions: e.g., Purushhanda, king of the four quarters
divinity implied at death	divinity claimed by some successors

Comparisons

Much closer to Ctesias' time, stories of the monumental works and great deeds of the Neo-Assyrian kings—and especially the Sargonids: Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal—still resonated with Cyrus the Great and his successors.[24] All these kings carefully constructed their images on Sargon of Akkad's model. For example, Sargon II (fig. 8) built an impressive new capital, Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad), and fought in far-flung and exotic places. The Achaemenid kings' expeditions to, and territorial claims upon, distant regions provided Ctesias with prototypes for Semiramis' legendary campaigns in Egypt and India.

Semiramis' birth closely parallels Sargon's as relayed in the *Sargon Birth Legend*, with a mother of high, even exalted, status and an unidentified father. Both stories fit the well-known pattern in which the hero, exposed in infancy and rescued, achieves greatness through exceptional characteristics, both physical and mental, and an ardent link with the divine.[25] Semiramis' connections to water echo those of Sargon, who was placed in a river. While Semiramis was exposed in a desolate region (a situation more typical in Greek traditions), her mother Derketo is associated with a deep lake full of fish, and Derketo herself became a fish. The fish motif is also manifest in Semiramis' first marriage to Onnes, who is identified with the sage Oannes (Adapa) of Mesopotamian fame.[26] Whereas Semiramis was raised by doves, on the other hand, Sargon's legend lacks the motif of the infant raised in the wild.

A key plot point in both Semiramis' and Sargon's stories is the access of these outsiders to the royal household. Simmas is explicitly identified as a servant of Ninos, and his position in charge of the royal cattle suggests some status. The implication in the Sargon Legend is that Aqqi, the water-drawer who found Sargon, was a lower-class servant. The story progresses from Sargon's youth as a gardener to his

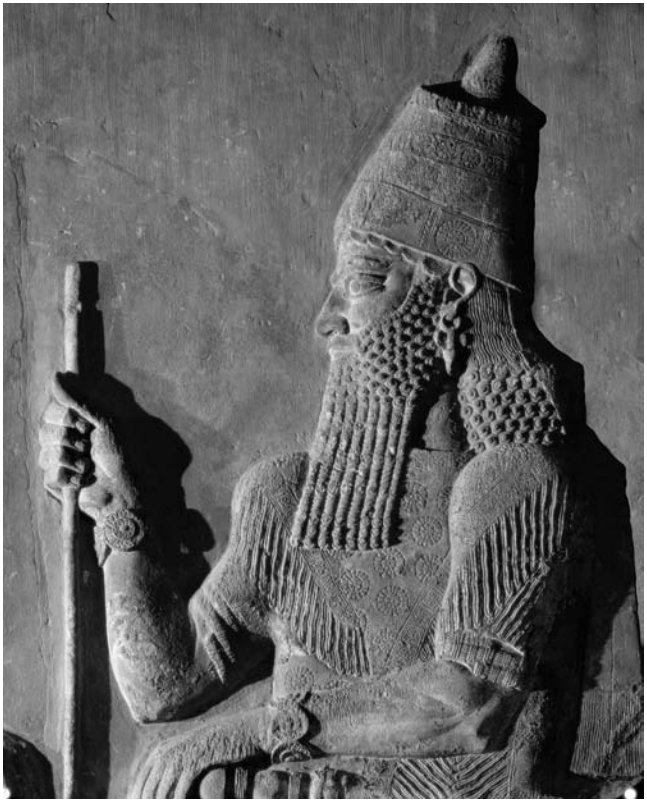

Figure 8. Sargon II, relief from Khorsabad (Dur Sharrukin), late eighth century BCE. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photograph: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

becoming beloved by Ishtar to his kingship. Before he became king, Sargon was the cupbearer of Urzababa and thus held a prestigious position at court. This detail matches exactly, and not coincidentally, the position that Cyrus attained in the court of Astyages (see chapter 3).

Semiramis' introduction to the royal court came from marriage to Onnes. Onnes is described as a high-ranking official (ὕπαρχος) who, during an inspection of Simmas' herds, became enamored of Semiramis and took her to wife. But Semiramis' aura burned too brightly for Onnes, who found himself enslaved to her. In essence, Onnes was inverted, feminized, consumed by love (Diod. Sic. 2.6.10)—a distinctly unmanly reaction that recalls the fate of Stryangaios elsewhere in the *Persica* (see chapter 4). When Ninos compelled Onnes to give Semiramis up, Onnes committed suicide. This portrayal of a character overcome by splendor

brings to mind the aura associated with deities and kings in the Mesopotamian tradition, the *melammu*.[27] The manifest *melammu* could engender a range of reactions, including awe, devotion, and terror. Onnes' demise reads as a Ctesian take on a prominent Near Eastern phenomenon, describing one who remained too close to, and was thus consumed by, this radiance.

Semiramis was introduced to Ninos while he was besieging Bactra. Her journey there, alone, demonstrated her intelligence, courage, and daring.[28] To facilitate her journey she created a special garment, which is described at some length, with emphasis on its pliable nature and suitability to youth, ability to shield the wearer from the sun, and, somewhat vaguely, its adaptability for any purpose.[29] A key point here is that Semiramis created this garb that made it impossible to discern whether the wearer was a man or a woman, so that she might travel in disguise. Disguise is a common folktale motif across cultures.[30] The popular Mesopotamian story called *The Poor Man of Nippur* also featured disguise, though in a different context. Its protagonist, Gimil-Ninurta, achieved revenge on an evil mayor through a series of disguises and stratagems, the application of effective disguise once again associated with intelligence.[31]

The garment with special properties finds other manifestations in Mesopotamian tradition. The hero Enmerkar of Uruk, in the course of a series of challenges posed by the lord of Aratta, is required to produce a cloth with no color as evidence of his cleverness. Translations of the key passage differ, but a garment with unusual properties is at issue. Semiramis' garment is an echo of early dynastic Sumerian lore that persisted through the centuries.[32] The great distance between the cities of Uruk and Aratta enhances the parallel with Semiramis' journey to distant Bactria.

Upon Ninos' death, Semiramis became sole ruler. Ctesias highlighted her military exploits, with heavy emphasis on her construction works as well. Beyond those noted above, also noteworthy was her attention to bridges and water works and even a palace relief of the typical Assyrian type. These elements find numerous parallels in Assyrian royal inscriptions of the seventh century and have been frequently noted.[33] Sargon of Akkad established the model for campaigns to the ends of the earth, the four quarters of the compass (reflected in the Mesopotamian royal title "King of the Four Quarters"—*šar kibrātim erbetti*[34]).The phenomenon is most evident in *Sargon, King of Battle*, which relates Sargon's campaign against Purushhanda in central Anatolia, over difficult territory and obstacles, and extols his leadership and daring. Subsequent kings cast military campaigns as a matter of necessity. Campaigns were often attributed to the obligation to enforce compacts with rebellious regions, and any expansionist imperative was often couched in those terms.[35] The extent of Semiramis' campaigning—Bactria (with Ninos),

Armenia, Media and other points in northern Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia, as well as India[36]—places her on par with, and even surpassing, the Assyrian and Persian kings of historical tradition.

Semiramis' building activities included parks and roads, for both aesthetic and practical purposes. Her construction of parks (e.g., Diod. Sic. 2.13.1) finds parallels in both Assyrian and Achaemenid practice. The paradigmatic example of the former is Sennacherib's palace without rival (*ekallu ša šānina lā īšû*), his own description for it. His extensive depiction provides the blueprint for its construction and features—including specific details about the transport of materials and the engineering marvels used to create orchards and gardens. Achaemenid gardens and parks (Greek *paradeisoi*) were a feature of Cyrus' reign, implemented within his new capital Pasargadae and perpetuated by his successors.[37]

Commerce was also a concern of the responsible ruler, and even in *Sargon, King of Battle* there is a role for merchants (obv. lines 13–23), who express concern over Sargon's plans for a distant expedition, worried about the consequences for their economic activities.[38] Ctesias' account of Semiramis' building activities emphasizes the frequency of trading posts on the roads and their impact on commerce. Her construction activity often involves cutting through the mountains: sometimes to fill in crevices for her construction projects or roads, sometimes to establish canals—that is, qanats (e.g., Diod. Sic. 2.13). In the *Sargon Birth Legend* (lines 15–17), immediately after becoming king, Sargon went to work: "With copper pickaxes I did cut my way through the (most) difficult mountains. I did ascend all the high mountains." Lines 22–23 contain Sargon's challenge to his successors to emulate his great deeds. Similarly, in *Sargon, King of Battle*, one of the obstacles he faced on the road to Purushhanda was the "Mighty Mountain" (obv. 28, rev. 5′ and 17′).[39] The motif occurs frequently in Mesopotamian tradition: for example, it appears several times in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, where Gilgamesh is celebrated as "one who opened passes in the mountains" (Standard Babylonian Version, tablet i, line 38).[40]

Surmounting these challenges, literally and figuratively, testified to one's fitness to rule. Mountains always had a magical place in the lowland Mesopotamian tradition, the paradigmatic "outside" or "other"—filled with strange and hostile beings, a place of danger.[41] One version of Semiramis' death involved a plot by her sons and a eunuch to push her off a cliff (F1ld*, Nicolaus; see chapter 1, no. 1). Most versions of her death involve a metamorphosis: she turned into a dove, implying that she became an immortal like her mother Derketo. Immortality is a feature missing in Sargon of Akkad's stories, though it finds expression among a few of his successors. Sargon's grandson Naram-Sin, around whom many legends also coalesced, claimed divinity while still living: manifest both via his portrayal

wearing a helmet with the divine horns in the famous Stele of Naram-Sin and in his own inscriptions. The DINGIR sign, the determinative that indicated a god, precedes his name, and a cult was founded for offerings to his temple.[42]

Like Sargon, Naram-Sin waged a campaign against a strange enemy that involved opening paths through the mountains.[43] Surpassing one's predecessor is always a worthy goal, and one may consider that it was a wish to surpass Ninos' conquests that led Semiramis to wage war against India and King Strabrobates. The exchange of messages between Naram-Sin and the lord of Apishal (col. v) and the exchange between Semiramis and Strabrobates (Diod. Sic. 2.18.1–2) stem from common ground, but the motif is hardly uncommon. The alternation of speeches in *Sargon, King of Battle* between Sargon and Nur-Dagan (of Purushhanda) serves in place of an exchange of messages. As soon as Nur-Dagan's defiant speech is finished (rev. lines 7′–8′), the narrative presents Sargon capturing the city, reflective of the speed with which the Akkadian king implemented his battle array across vast distances and obstacles. This is similar in conception, if not direct application, to Semiramis' dismissal of Strabrobates' message to her en route just before battle commences; her emphasis is on deeds, not words. These narratives accent the distance and difficulty of the campaign to the ends of the earth, coupled with the qualities of the ruler and amplified by the magnitude of his (or her) resources.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of Semiramis' Indian campaign, juxtaposed with a string of successful conquests and building projects, is that she failed. Not enough of the story exists to make her a tragic figure—as Naram-Sin became[44]—but, for reasons unexplained, fate turned against her. In an Akkadian composition, such a reversal would be attributed to a divine agent (or agents), but no deity is identified in the case of Semiramis' failure. Certain aspects of that campaign, unsurprisingly, fit better into the Greek historiographic tradition, though the danger of hubris is certainly not unique to that cultural context. After an initial, impressive victory and Strabrobates' withdrawal, Semiramis crosses the river to continue the battle. The crossing is effected only after construction of a great pontoon bridge, another manifestation of an Assyrian or Babylonian ruler's construction legacy, but one that would lead the Greek reader to recall Xerxes' crossing of the Hellespont or Darius' of the Bosporus.

The crossing of boundaries as a manifestation of hubris fits well within the Classical context, Ctesias' engagement of a Herodotean motif.[45] When Semiramis crosses the river, things start to go awry: her dummy elephants are revealed, and Strabrobates' real elephants are deployed to devastating effect. Semiramis' army is routed, and she herself is wounded. Her superior qualities—again, reminiscent of Mesopotamian rulers' physical and mental attributes—enable her to escape and, in the process, inflict another round of heavy casualties by cutting the pontoon

bridge while Strabrobates' forces are in pursuit. In contrast to the driven Semiramis, Strabrobates, mindful of unfavorable omens, did not cross the river to pursue the battle. She withdrew her forces, her grand plan of expansion forestalled. The account then proceeds to her death.

Semiramis and (as) Ishtar

Semiramis' transition to divinity heightens another important Near Eastern connection: an association with the Akkadian goddess Ishtar, both through the syncretism of Semiramis' mother Derketo and through some of Semiramis' own characteristics. To what extent Ctesias may have consciously developed this parallel must remain an open question. Ishtar (Sumerian Inanna) was an important and complex goddess, the paradigmatic feminine who was also closely associated with several masculine traits. R. Harris' classic study of the goddess describes her dual nature: "Inanna-Ishtar is both female and male. Over and over again the texts juxtapose the masculine and feminine traits and behavior of the goddess. She can be both compassionate, supportive, and nurturing and assertive, aggressive, and strong-willed. In short, she breaks the boundaries between the sexes by embodying both femaleness and maleness" (1991, 268).[46]

Semiramis' masculine attributes have been noted, and in Ctesias they are fundamental to her success, juxtaposed with her feminine beauty and sexual allure. One episode highlights her gendered ambiguity and reinforces the link to the goddess Ishtar, though in Diodorus' rendition it is a single reference to her sexually preying upon and then killing attractive young men from her own army (Diod. Sic. 2.13.4; see above). This somewhat shocking detail was no doubt meant to be titillating, but no further detail is supplied in the extant text.

The warrior queen with an insatiable sexual appetite is the paradoxical Ishtar: the goddess of battle (or violence) and sexual love. Ishtar was renowned for her stable of lovers, most of whom came to a bad end, though none appears to have been killed outright: the case of the dying and resurrected Dumuzi is a notable, but special, exception. In a famous passage in the *Gilgamesh Epic* (Standard Babylonian Version, tablet vi, lines 22–79), after Gilgamesh spurns Ishtar's advances, he enumerates some of Ishtar's other lovers, a lengthy list that alludes to several other extant myths.[47]

Semiramis incorporated masculine (Sargon) and feminine (Ishtar) elements in one being: an already compelling character became unique. The names of Sargon or Naram-Sin would have meant little to a fourth-century Greek audience in Ionia. For a hypothetical Babylonian audience, even a Hellenized Semiramis would have been identifiable as a manifestation of their own kings' adventures and

accomplishments, well entrenched in the tradition for centuries. J. Westenholz ends her survey of Akkadian heroic legends with words about Sargon that it seems appropriate to apply to the Semiramis saga as well: "The cycle of legendary stories about the Old Akkadian monarchs is 'historical' in the sense that the narratives offer examples of how history was and always should be. As recorded in an omen, Sargon was, like Arthur, the once and future king: *šanāte Šarru-kēn ina māti ušabšâ*, 'he will make the years of Sargon recur in the land'" (2009, 44).[48]

Sargon of Akkad's legend was augmented by the exploits of the Assyrian kings (and some queens), who—not coincidentally—were expected to succeed according to the same criteria. This was a necessity. Ctesias could hardly resist such a character, a hybridized Semiramis who embodied the Greek fascination with opposites and inversion. In the end, one may only speculate on Ctesias' particular inspirations—note the plural—for his Semiramis, but Sargon of Akkad provided a clear and ever-present model.

3 A Different Kind of Education for Cyrus

Ctesias' account of Cyrus the Great is preserved mainly by two transmitters, Nicolaus of Damascus and Photius. Nicolaus recorded Cyrus' early career up to the defeat of Astyages, and Photius summarized Cyrus' campaigns and reign as king. The caveats about transmission discussed in the introduction become particularly acute when applied to Nicolaus' account. He may have used other sources (e.g., Deinon) for Cyrus' life, thus departing from Ctesias' *Persica*, but it is impossible to discern at what points and to what extent.[1] With that qualification, however, the plot and themes discussed in this chapter are assumed to stem from Ctesias', directly or indirectly, unless noted otherwise.

Cyrus, King of Anshan, and His Genealogy

Why does Ctesias' account differ so drastically from other Greek accounts, particularly that of Herodotus? Herodotus recorded that he knew of three other versions of Cyrus' story and followed the one that glorified Cyrus least (1.95). Whether Ctesias' story is one of the others that Herodotus heard cannot be substantiated. Ctesias' version of Cyrus' birth and early childhood, much more mundane than Herodotus', is interpreted by some as denigrating.[2] The simplest answer to the question posed above is the same one offered to explain other differences: Ctesias' continuing "corrective" of Herodotus was a way to set his work apart from that of his predecessor and rival. The differences in Ctesias start even before conception. Photius explicitly notes (F9 §1) that Ctesias made a point of correcting Astyages' name (to "Astyigas"—Ἀστυίγας) and emphasizing that Cyrus and Astyages were not related, both marked differences from Herodotus (fig. 9). Despite the inclusion of similar folkloric and legendary elements in both accounts,

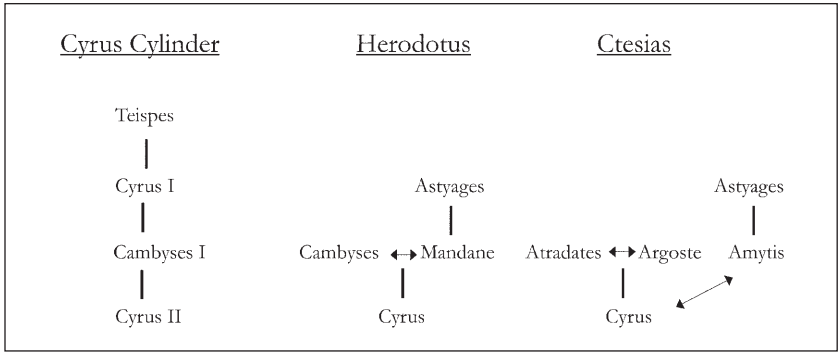

Figure 9. Lineages of Cyrus, according to the Cyrus Cylinder (line 21), Herodotus (1.107–108), and Ctesias (F8d* §3).

Herodotus at least provides the correct name for Cyrus' father, as confirmed by Cyrus himself in royal inscriptions from Babylon and Ur.

In matters of genealogy, Cyrus' own inscriptions take precedence. Standard Assyrian, Babylonian, and Elamite royal inscriptions relay only the male line, and the Persians did likewise. Cyrus' lineage is traced through three generations in the Cyrus Cylinder (fig. 10, line 21), with each forebear identified as "king of Anshan." In brick stamp inscriptions from Ur, Cyrus' father Cambyses is also identified as "king of Anshan." Anshan was the name of both a region and a city. The latter was located on the site of modern Tall-i Malyan, which lies roughly thirty miles west of the later Persian capital Persepolis. Anshan was an ancient seat of Elamite authority but appears to have been abandoned ca. 1000 BCE with no large-scale settlement at the site thereafter—or, at least, none has yet been discovered. That lack poses a historical conundrum, but it does not necessarily imply that Anshan was a cipher.

The toponym "Anshan" occurs sporadically but in high-profile examples in the documentary evidence ranging from the Neo-Assyrian to the Achaemenid periods. Cyrus chose the title "king of Anshan" for a reason, beyond the simple fact that it was the region of which he was initially king. The ideological nuances of this title, which recalls the traditional Elamite title "king of Anshan and Susa," remain contentious in modern scholarship.[3] Suffice it to note that the Elamites play no obvious role in any Greek tradition of Cyrus' rise, where pride of place after the Persians is given instead to the Medes.[4] Cyrus is either descended from the Median royal family (Herodotus, Xenophon, et al.) or closely linked to it (Ctesias[5]). The particulars of these genealogies are indicated in figure 9 and discussed below. One has to look beyond the surface, figuratively and literally, to

Figure 10. Cyrus Cylinder, from Babylon, ca. 539 BCE. British Museum, London. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

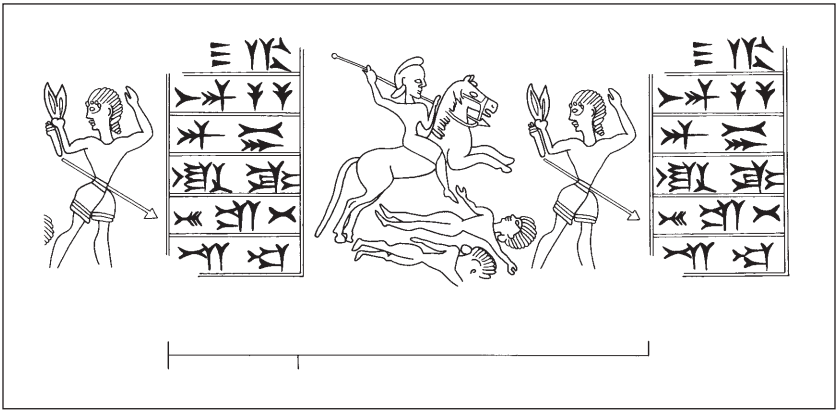

Figure 11. Cyrus, in collated line drawing of PFS 93* from the Persepolis Fortification Archive. The Elamite inscription reads "Cyrus of Anshan, son of Teispes." Courtesy of the Persepolis Seal Project and the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project.

appreciate the Elamite impact on the Persians and the eloquent examples of Elamite-Persian acculturation in the geographic locus of Anshan.

For the activities of Cyrus' predecessors, the forebears listed in the Cyrus Cylinder, there is little evidence. The Persepolis Fortification Seal PFS 93* (fig. 11)—a sealing of Cyrus, son of Teispes, of Anshan—must have belonged to Cyrus the Great's grandfather. It was clearly an heirloom when used in the Fortification tablets, which date to the reign of Darius I, but many questions surround its origins and who wielded it in official contexts. A tantalizing link between the Cyrus of PFS 93* and the Cyrus, king of Parsumash, who paid obeisance to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal ca. 645–640 after the latter's ruinous campaigns in Elam, is also debated.[6] This Near Eastern evidence serves as a cautionary check on the veracity of the various Greek traditions' accounts of Cyrus the Great's origins and youth—as if the Herodotean and Ctesian differences were not stark enough—and reinforces the hypothesis that Ctesias was working mainly with oral, unofficial traditions.

Ctesias' Cyrus Saga

The Medes had a custom whereby a poor man might offer himself to a wealthy one and enter into his service in exchange for his keep. This custom included the provision that if the wealthy man did not provide the appropriate upkeep, the poor man was free to leave his service and enter that of another. This practice frames Cyrus' entry into the palace household as a boy, and his rise to prominence through a series of masters within it. This is, as the chapter title states, a different kind of education for Cyrus: different from his education as implied by Herodotus (1.121–123: once Cyrus' identity was revealed and he was returned to his parents) or as related by Xenophon subsequently in the *Cyropaedia*. The Ctesian version tracked Cyrus through a series of jobs in a variety of palace functions and administrative posts.[7] His life from his youth onward is set within the Median palace system, but he started out as a menial before he served in the royal court of Asytages.

Ctesias' Cyrus was the son of Atradates, a bandit, and Argoste, a goat-herder. Atradates' name bears close resemblance to "Agradates" (Strabo 15.3.6), the purported birth name of Cyrus before he became king.[8] Discovery of Cyrus' birth name would be considered big news, but Strabo's tradition finds no confirmation whatsoever in any of the contemporary, or even near-contemporary, sources for Cyrus, Babylonian or Greek. It is unclear on what Strabo's information is based. Herodotus notes that Cyrus was called something else in his youth, but this refers, of course, to the time when he was being raised by the herdsman Mitradates and Spaco (Hdt. 1.113–114). The story may reflect the fact that "Cyrus" was a throne name. The suggestion is consistent with centuries of Near Eastern practice in

which the crown prince took a throne name upon designation, but these indirect inferences cannot settle the question of whether Cyrus did so. There are several distinct Cyruses in the documentary evidence for the sixth century. The name has been etymologized as both Persian ("humiliator of the enemy") and Elamite ("he who bestows care"), with the latter finding wider acceptance in the scholarly literature.[9] These remain open issues.

In the Ctesian tradition Cyrus' parents were Mardians, a Persian tribe, according to both Herodotus (1.125) and Strabo (15.3.1). Strabo identifies the Mardians as bandits, perhaps tracing that association to Ctesias.[10] Allusions to Cyrus' Mardian origins and his "wretched goat-herder" upbringing occur periodically throughout the account, mainly from the mouth of a scornful Astyages (e.g., F8d* §30). The appellation is clearly not a compliment. For reasons unexplained in the transmitted version—though the clear implication is that he wanted to better his lot in life and advance toward his destiny—Cyrus delivered himself into the care of one of the palace groundskeepers. When he performed well in that job, his supervisor arranged with the supervisor of the interior cleaners for a promotion for Cyrus. That man was harsh and beat Cyrus, who then put himself in the care of one of the torchbearers.[11] Cyrus thus climbed the ladder through discernment, intelligence, and effective service until he entered the service of Artembares, the supervisor (ἐπιστάτης) of the cupbearers and the king's personal wine steward.[12] Cyrus served as wine pourer for the king's table companions, and his conscientiousness and grace in that function drew the attention of Astyages himself.

Ctesias' version differs significantly from that of Herodotus and, as noted, reveals a desire to "correct" his rival. None of the miraculous elements associated with the motif of the hero exposed at birth is manifest here, but humble origin and upbringing are prominent. The Cnidian author was clearly enamored of the popular Sargon birth legend, though it is somewhat modified for Cyrus from its manifestation in the Semiramis story.[13] A. Kuhrt detects two levels—intertwined rather than exclusive—of the Sargon legends. The first was an official, political message emphasizing Sargon's right to rule through noble lineage; and the motif of the hero exposed at birth component heightened the ruler's mystique, thus the Herodotean take on the story. The other theme was conveyed by a moralizing "rags-to-riches" story of a non-noble who became king through his own ability and hard work, despite the circumstances of his birth. In Kuhrt's view, underlying Ctesias' version was a moralizing version of the Sargon Legend.[14] This approach makes sense, though the closely paralleled Oibaras saga (see below) suggests that there were other inputs as well.

Perhaps Ctesias chose to heighten Cyrus' image by exaggerating the motif of his lowly upbringing. Cyrus' early life included a criminal father, abuse as a boy in

the Median palace household, a succession of jobs generally associated in the Greek tradition with eunuchs, and eventual adoption by a eunuch. If that was Ctesias' intent, it is not clear that he achieved the desired effect. Such a background does throw into sharp relief Cyrus' eventual accomplishments and status, but the hero-exposed motif in Herodotus achieves the same outcome. Perhaps Ctesias was merely playing with a trope. The requisite hand of Fate, abundantly evident later in the transmitted accounts,[15] makes no explicit appearance in the early parts of the extant Cyrus narrative: Cyrus' ambition and perseverance are the main drivers.

Does his progression from exterior cleaner to interior cleaner to lamp-holder to cupbearer reflect the remnants of some sort of hierarchy or *cursus honorum* among the palace staff? Is this something to which Ctesias, as a domestic functionary himself, could relate? Cyrus' role here recalls that of Prexaspes' son in Herodotus 3.34. Prexaspes is described as a message carrier and his son as cupbearer, both positions of high honor. Greek authors' tendencies to interpret Persian court titles in the literal sense, even if they were honorific and had little to do with actual domestic service, often confuse the full significance of these titles.[16] Titles as honorifics were important components of court structure, but whether they were translated accurately into Ctesias' narrative may be doubted: his purposes were far removed from a careful rendering of court hierarchy.

Shortly before Artembares' death, Cyrus was adopted by him and took his place as chief cupbearer, with a concomitant increase in wealth and status. At this point Nicolaus' account is clearly telescoped, and the details included seem supplied mainly as background for what follows. Astyages' daughter Amytis, Cyrus' future wife, is introduced, though Nicolaus' account, which ends with Cyrus' victory over Astyages, does not say much more about her. She was married to a Median named Spitamas, who through the marriage effectively became Astyages' heir (F8d* §8).[17] Amytis was a common name among later Achaemenid princesses, but the Median Amytis is a conflation and a bit of a cipher.[18] Cyrus had two sons with her, Cambyses and Tanyoxarkes (F9 §1, F13 §11–13, Photius). Thus, in the Ctesian version, Cyrus had no familial link to the Median royal line but gained rule solely through conquest (and through divine favor, implied by dreams and portents) and then buttressed his position by marriage to the Median princess.

Cyrus' Defeat of Astyages as Told by Nabonidus

The political relationship between the Persians and the Medes has long been debated in modern scholarship. Both the Herodotean and Ctesian versions take for granted Median domination of early Persia, a perspective supported,

Figure 12. Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus, Sippar, 540s BCE. British Museum, London. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource, NY.

in some interpretations, by a passage from the so-called Sippar Cylinder of the Babylonian king Nabonidus (fig. 12). The passage refers to a conversation, a dream omen, between Nabonidus and the god Marduk.

> Marduk declared to me [Nabonidus], saying: "The Umman-manda of whom you speak, he (?) and his land and the kings marching at his side are no longer a threat." When the third year arrived, the gods caused to rise Cyrus, king of Anshan, his [Marduk's] young servant. With his small army he scattered the vast Umman-manda. Cyrus seized Ishtumegu, king of the Umman-manda and took him captive to his [Cyrus'] land.[19]

A key element in interpreting this passage hinges on the translation of the word *arassu* (i.e., ÌR-*su* for *ardu-šu*), "his servant." Whose young servant? Those who understand "his" to mean "Astyages' (Ishtumegu's) servant" take this as confirmation that the Persians were ruled by the Medes. Those who understand the passage to mean "Marduk's servant" (as I do here) base that interpretation on typical dream formulae in Mesopotamian texts, wherein the god's servant as agent is emphasized.[20] The idea of a foreign power as an instrument of punishment inflicted by the gods is also a typical Mesopotamian motif. The blueprint—which

persisted for centuries—shows mountainous barbarians ranged against the king of the urban, civilized core. A prominent early example was the Akkadian king Naram-Sin.[21] In the Naram-Sin example, as with Nabonidus, the mountainous barbarians are the *umman-manda*.[22] For Nabonidus, the gods supply an external agent—the Persians—to effect the *umman-manda*'s downfall.

Understanding "his young servant" as Marduk's, not Astyages', removes any independent confirmation for Median suzerainty over the Persians. The Medes' capacity to control large territories as a unified, centralized empire has been cast into serious doubt since the publication of *Continuity of Empire (?): Assyria, Media, Persia*.[23] One's definition of "empire," and one's estimate of the level of influence a Median king may have exercised over contiguous regions, impacts interpretation. Suffice it to reiterate that we have no external confirmation for Median rule over southern territories such as Parsa, but since we have so little data for the period between ca. 650 and 550 in southwestern Iran to begin with, that is not saying much; the case is not closed. Cyrus' links to the Median dynastic line seem more like postconquest justifications, intended to supply necessary legitimacy, than a faithful rendering of his ancestry. Whatever the other faults of Ctesias' account of Cyrus' origins may be—and there is no shortage of those—his extrication of Cyrus from the Median dynastic line fits conceptually with an independent Persian kingdom that was able to challenge the Medes for supremacy in Iran and beyond.

Back to Ctesias (via Nicolaus) on Cyrus

To return to the Nicolaus excerpt (F8d* §8–9): it is at the point when Amytis is first introduced and Cyrus' stock is on the rise that Fate makes an appearance. The seemingly offhand introduction to Amytis, then married to a certain Spitamas, is loaded, for her dowry was all of Media. The immediate shift in emphasis back to Cyrus and his destiny is no coincidence, whether it fully reflects the original or is a product of Nicolaus' editing. For Cyrus will in the end take Amytis as his wife and Media as his possession. Having summoned his parents to court, Cyrus heard from his mother of the dream she had while pregnant with him. In the dream, Argoste urinated so much that a flood swept over all Asia. This passage parallels Herodotus' account (1.107–108) of Astyages' dreams involving his daughter Mandane, who became Cyrus' mother in that version of the story.[24] Aside from the dreams' particulars (a flood of urine, an overgrown vine), in Herodotus' version Astyages himself had the dreams and set in motion the events leading to his own downfall. In Ctesias' version, the dream was external to the Median royal house, and Astyages knew nothing of it—portents appearing directly to him came later. The idea of the deluge as a destructive force was commonly applied to deities

and kings in the Mesopotamian tradition in phrasing such as "the king whose passage is the deluge." But the flood consisted of water, not urine. That Ctesias may be supplying an analogue to the destructive power of the Flood seems appropriate, but the exact connotations of the urine are unclear.[25]

At his father's advice, Cyrus sought out a learned Chaldean (Babylonian) to interpret the dream. This man's name is never provided in the extant Ctesian tradition. The parallels between Cyrus' Babylonian seer and the Belesys of the Arbakes saga are obvious (see chapter 4); indeed, the two stories are quite similar in framework, though the Cyrus saga includes a vitally important third character, Oibaras. The Babylonian's interpretation of the dream revealed Cyrus' destiny as master of Asia, but he counseled Cyrus not to reveal this, since it would put both their lives in jeopardy should Astyages learn of it. The seer and Cyrus swore oaths, and the seer became Cyrus' close confidant and helper, supplemented and subsequently supplanted by Oibaras.

Meanwhile, Cyrus' increasing prestige in Astyages' service secured important upgrades for his parents, including, surprisingly, the appointment of his father as satrap of Persia and the establishment of his mother as "the first among Persian women in both wealth and power" (F8d* §10: ἐποίησεν καὶ τὴν μητέρα πλούτῳ τε καὶ δυνάμει Περσίδων πρώτην). The glaring disconnect from their original status is never addressed; the promotion is simply an extension of Cyrus' newfound prominence. The detail seems almost incidental in the telling, but the development is not easily explained except as a half-baked attempt to move the narrative forward by condensing some important plot developments into a single sentence. The reader may be excused for feeling that either Ctesias or Nicolaus has omitted something significant.

High-level promotions and appointments are the prerogative of kings, so perhaps some anticipation of Cyrus' eventual victory may be allowed, but such a justification seems a real stretch. More likely, Atradates' surprising appointment preserves a distant and distorted echo of Cyrus and his father as kings of Anshan. The region was by Cyrus' time effectively synonymous with Persia in the narrow sense of Parsa, the rough equivalent of modern Fars. A rough parallel may be found in another narrative. Darius I's victory monument at Bisitun refers suddenly (DB §35)—suddenly from our perspective—to his father, Hystaspes, as holding a prominent position as the leader of a military force (perhaps a satrap) in Parthia. This is correlative to Hystaspes' important position as described in Herodotus, but in neither case is his high standing a surprise, regardless of the accuracy of the details. Whether there is significance in Ctesias' having placed Cyrus' father in a position of authority over Persia proper (Parsa), as Herodotus did with Darius' father (3.70), is difficult to say without further data.

The Ctesian version continues with Astyages dispatching Cyrus to negotiate terms with Onaphernes, king of the Cadusians, whose land was north of the Medes. The Cadusians were at war with the Medes, but Onaphernes intended to betray his people to Astyages. It is in this context that Cyrus contemplated his own rebellion. The Babylonian seer encouraged the endeavor and was promised great rewards should Cyrus be successful. Cyrus' initiative was now cast in terms of his own destiny (F8d* §12–13), and it was at this precise point that he met another Persian, Oibaras, also destined to be heavily involved in the enterprise. The appearance of Oibaras served as a powerful omen for Cyrus, and was so interpreted by the Babylonian seer via a sequence of positive signs: Oibaras as a fellow Persian far from home; one carrying horse manure, interpreted as a sign of wealth and power; and one whose name meant "noble messenger."[26] Oibaras was also a whipped servant, a not incidental detail recalling Cyrus' early career in Astyages' household (F8d* §4).

Oibaras became Cyrus' right-hand man and played such an integral part in overthrowing the Medes that his role in establishing Persian power may be considered almost equal to Cyrus'. The Ctesian version juxtaposed a tradition celebrating Oibaras with one of the Cyrus legends. Herodotus related two slightly different versions (3.85–87) of a story about how a groomsman named Oibaras enabled Darius' accession through his trick with the horses. This testifies to an independent tradition of this character that preceded both authors, and one would be hard-pressed to conceive it as entirely a product of Greek imagination.[27] In the Ctesian rendition, though there is no doubt that Cyrus was in charge of the operation, Oibaras encouraged, exhorted, and strategized at key points in the narrative to ensure Cyrus' success. This is a curious phenomenon in Cyrus' story, for while he may have been abetted by others (e.g., Harpagus in Herodotus), we have no comparable team approach in the extant literature on Cyrus' rise to power. Of course, the hero-with-helper motif is hardly uncommon; in the Babylonian tradition it is typified by Gilgamesh and Enkidu.[28]

An already-mentioned close parallel may be found within the *Persica* itself. But Ctesias' Arbakes-Belesys doublet (see chapter 4) contains important thematic differences. Both Arbakes and Belesys were of noble (or, at least, not ignoble) rank, and, as noted above, the character of Belesys is better paralleled by the Babylonian seer who initially encouraged Cyrus than by Oibaras. Further, though Belesys had an important role in the overthrow of Assyria, as a general he did not exhibit the same level of engagement in planning and in exhorting Arbakes that Oibaras showed for Cyrus. Again, however, the telescoped nature of the accounts must be acknowledged, along with the possibility of Nicolaus' own modifications and uneven representation of the original. To judge from the transmitted versions,

Oibaras was the more compelling character in any comparison. That the Ctesian version was meant to contrast the humble Persian Oibaras' virtues with the dissimilar attributes of the Medes and Babylonians seems clear enough, but determining to what extent Ctesias arranged this as a Greek trope or reflected elements within Persian tradition is anything but straightforward.

The good omens manifested by Oibaras sealed the deal: rather than neutralizing the Cadusian rebellion, as Astyages had ordered, Cyrus instead exchanged oaths with Onaphernes to rebel against Astyages.[29] Upon his return to Media, Cyrus granted Oibaras the requisite markers of his new stature as a Persian grandee: a horse, Persian raiment, and a retinue.[30] This formally moved Oibaras beyond his initial humble status, on a different track from the one his master took to become a royal courtier. Both Cyrus and Oibaras manifest similar qualities of discernment, even-handedness, and bold action. Oibaras' value to Cyrus is described as a function of his good sense and good company, and he became Cyrus' most trusted advisor and main motivator. It was Oibaras who encouraged Cyrus at the decisive moment to follow through with the plan to overthrow the Medes, who provided the plan for the revolt, and who suggested a scheme for Cyrus to extricate himself from Astyages' court.

Then follows a curious dialogue, initiated by Oibaras but guided by Cyrus, using what is termed here rhetorical exhortation (F8d* §14–15). Oibaras lamented Median dominion over the Persians and the lack of a man of sufficient character and nobility (μεγαλόφρων τε καὶ μεγαλογνώμων) to effect the Persians' freedom. Cyrus led Oibaras into an exchange whereby Oibaras described a man just like Cyrus, without initially naming him. Oibaras ultimately identified Cyrus as the right man to undertake this endeavor, emphasizing his own willingness to assist. Cyrus then confided in Oibaras his plan to rebel. If the dialogue is considered Nicolaus' invention—and in its extant form it must, of course, be considered Nicolaus'[31]—one is left to consider what has been preserved of the Ctesian original. As discussed in the introduction of this book, it is my argument that Nicolaus' thematic core, plot, and characterizations remain faithful to the original *Persica*, and these features do in fact match well with the context preserved in other transmitters, such as Photius (cf. F9 §4).

The Mesopotamian tradition contains a tremendous variety of dialogues between humans, animals, and divine beings in the form of prayers, disputes, wisdom and didactic texts, and exhortations.[32] A prominent antecedent may be found in the exhortations of Enkidu to a quailing Gilgamesh as they stand face to face with the mighty Humbaba (Standard Babylonian Version, tablet v, lines 90ff.).[33] A lacuna in the text deprives us of the whole exchange, which precludes a full comparison. Suffice it to note that even though it is necessary to credit Nicolaus

as the author of the Cyrus-Oibaras dialogue as it stands, there is no shortage of Near Eastern antecedents—passed down in both written and oral traditions—that may have inspired Ctesias.

The narrative then has Oibaras take a drastic step. Concerned about the Babylonian seer's knowledge of the plan to revolt, Oibaras killed him. He was ostensibly safeguarding the secret of the impending rebellion, but this episode reads as a rivalry between advisors. The seer had encouraged Cyrus earlier and, somewhat ironically, urged him to include Oibaras in their schemes. Oibaras pressed Cyrus to kill the seer, but Cyrus refused to countenance such an act, so Oibaras took matters into his own hands. Under cover of religious obligation, Oibaras hatched a plan whose elaborateness befitted the cleverness so consistently celebrated in the narrative.[34] He dug a deep hole in his tent and covered it with thick cushions. Having arranged to dine with the seer—without Cyrus, who usually joined them—Oibaras proceeded to get the seer drunk and then pushed him into the hole, accompanied by the seer's servant in order to eliminate any witnesses. When Oibaras, after some prevaricating, finally revealed the deed to Cyrus, the latter's anger caused him initially to reject Oibaras. But Oibaras was soon brought back within the fold, and Cyrus went so far as to lie to the wife of the murdered seer on Oibaras' behalf.

Plans for the revolt commenced. Word was sent to Cyrus' father, Atradates, the once-bandit now-satrap of Persia, to prepare an army, ostensibly for another campaign against the Cadusians, to avoid arousing Astyages' suspicions. All that remained was for Cyrus to secure Astyages' permission to depart for Persia, so that the revolt might begin under his direct leadership. Oibaras' role in moving the plot forward becomes more pronounced, by virtue of the initiative and leadership he provided in order to motivate the now surprisingly hesitant Cyrus. Oibaras' plan to vacate Astyages' court involved another ruse: asking if Cyrus could be allowed to offer sacrifices on Astyages' behalf and tend to Cyrus' purportedly infirm father. Astyages rejected the request because his fondness for Cyrus made him loath to grant him leave. Cyrus was stymied until Oibaras advised him to recruit a eunuch (see chapter 1, no. 29) to approach Astyages on his behalf. This ploy, notably implemented while Astyages was giddily drunk, was successful. With leave granted, Cyrus and Oibaras swiftly departed.

Shortly thereafter, Astyages learned the truth. The Babylonian seer's brother, having married the seer's widow, learned from her of the dream foretelling Cyrus' rise and, granted access by a eunuch (see chapter 1, no. 30), warned Astyages. The folktale elements of this story, whether they were in Ctesias' original or embellished by Nicolaus, become obvious. Astyages asked the man for advice, and he counseled the king to kill Cyrus. Astyages is portrayed as deeply troubled, mirroring the hesitancy exhibited by Cyrus before his departure. Whether this parallel is

meant to add pathos to the conflict is unclear. That evening while feasting, Astyages received another sign. One of his concubines sang a song about a lion that had a boar in its power and took it into the lion's own lair, where the boar became stronger until, in time, it turned the tables on the lion.[35] This conjunction of deep thought, hesitancy, and divine sign is, of course, well at home within Greek prose literature, but it also recalls a common motif in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions: the king pondering a decision, praying, and seeking insight from the gods through omens. M. Liverani summarizes the phenomenon: "In their actual political activities, the kings and their advisers had to decide on the basis of their practical knowledge of the affair, but they had to use the cultural codes of their times. There are basically two codes. The main code of Mesopotamian politics was that provided by divination, a set of techniques putting the king in direct contact with the divine world, the only source for correct instruction. Spontaneous omens (especially dreams) and solicited omens (especially extispicy, inspecting entrails) assured the ruler about the feasibility of his projects" (1995, 2364).[36]

Omen literature as a separate genre incorporates the essence of a thoughtful and judicious king seeking insight. Examples are legion. A responsible king, such as Esarhaddon, took action on rebuilding temples and shrines only after great thought and care, as well as appropriate consultation of the gods: "I kneeled reverently (seeking) the judgment of the gods Šamaš and Adad, and I stationed diviners to (ascertain) their true decisions. I had an extispicy performed."[37] Sometimes omens were spontaneous, like the Ashurbanipal-Ishtar dream exchange example (see chapter 4). Omens' impact on decision making was pervasive throughout the ancient Mediterranean.

Astyages understood the sign and dispatched horsemen to recall Cyrus. Although Oibaras' cleverness and worth are repeatedly emphasized, Ctesias' own take on the "wise advisor" motif, Cyrus then took the initiative. The trick to elude their pursuers involved drunkenness, another Ctesian reworking of a widespread trope. Cyrus assured Astyages' messengers that he would return, invited them to a feast, and got them drunk. Once the messengers were unconscious, Cyrus and Oibaras made their escape in order to prepare for the coming assault that would manifest Astyages' response.

Pursued by the revived messengers, Cyrus killed most of them in heroic combat. The hero-in-combat motif is so pervasive in world literature that any attempt to pinpoint Ctesias' potential influences here seems quixotic, but there are multiple Near Eastern antecedents. To focus on evident, ideological influences on the Achaemenids, Assyrian kings for centuries celebrated their individual martial prowess in stock phrases and epithets and often condensed the army's success into the first-person singular pronoun. King Ashurnasirpal II (r. 884–859) had an exceptional

run over several campaigns commemorated on reliefs of the Ninurta temple at Kalah (Nimrud). He personally, if the inscription is read literally, besieged and burned cities, slew enemies running into the thousands, and captured hundreds more. The "difficult road" motif and the king's persistence in overcoming obstacles and eviscerating enemies may be traced back to Sargon of Akkad (see chapter 2) and even earlier. Later Assyrian kings and their Babylonian and Achaemenid successors continued in the same vein: "I, Esarhaddon, mighty king . . . who does not turn back from unsheathed weapons and the onslaught of fierce battle, whose battle none of the kings among all of (his) enemies ever sought a second time (and) before whom no ruler, his opponent, (ever) stood in the place of battle." Darius I included these qualities in less colorful but no less meaningful terms in his tomb inscription at Naqsh-i Rustam (DNb §2g–h): "As a fighter I am a good fighter. . . . I am furious in the strength of my revenge."[38] Cyrus' actions against his Median pursuers fit the expectations for a (soon to be) king and demonstrate the necessary martial qualities, particulars of which are not highlighted in the transmitted versions of the *Persica*, but which follow long-standing paradigms.

Astyages, having heard the account of the survivors, slapped his thigh[39] and lamented his own credulousness. He abjured his good will to Cyrus, "a wretched goatherd" (F8d* §30, αἰπόλον κακόν) and a Mardian to boot, all obviously pejoratives in this context. During the course of the subsequent war, Astyages castigated Cyrus and the Persians as beggars and threatened all sorts of horrible punishments if they did not submit to him (F8d* §33). Cyrus' responses emphasized the power of the gods, embraced the Persians' (and his own) "goatherd" status, and reiterated the Persians' innate superiority over the Medes. Astyages' grudging acknowledgment of the Persians' bravery included the attribute "terebinth-eaters," whose full significance continues to be debated.[40] He assembled an enormous army, over a million strong, and advanced against the outnumbered, roughly three to one, Persians. (These are not bad odds, considering the literary circumstances.) Battles were fought at a place called Hyrba and around Pasargadae, and both were related at some length and on an epic scale. Pasargadae was styled a high mountain in the account, befitting Cyrus' choice of an elevated site for his capital, and a suitable place for his initial victory.[41]

Cyrus' father, Atradates, played a prominent role in the revolt until he was captured by Astyages. Atradates then disavowed Cyrus' actions and requested that he himself be spared further harm because he was already dying from his wounds. The beneficent Astyages accepted Atradates' word and even granted him an elaborate funeral, though the preceding narrative contradicts Atradates' protestations and confirms that he had been aware of the plan the whole time (F8d* §36–38; cf. §31). This is as bizarre as his sudden promotion to satrap in the extant narrative,

and one cannot help but agree that some of the opprobrium heaped on Ctesias in antiquity was deserved. Nicolaus included a short but important diversion in the dramatic account of the war's progress. In it, Cyrus returned to his parental home (§41–42), the place where Argoste dreamt of Cyrus' destiny. There the exhausted Cyrus made an offering in fire as lightning struck and thunder rolled to his right and propitious birds alighted upon his house, all omens indicating that Cyrus should persevere and go to Pasargadae.[42]

Oibaras was, unsurprisingly, prominent in the war. He was charged with transferring the population to walled cities and preparing the defense in Persis itself against the advancing Median army. Cyrus placed Oibaras in command of the left wing against the Median forces at the battle of Hyrba, and Oibaras displayed his mettle as a soldier and commander there and at the subsequent battles around Pasargadae.[43] Both Cyrus and Oibaras played key roles in exhorting the Persian troops, who numerous times experienced exhaustion and despair.[44] The climactic battle is not related by Nicolaus, but the Persians eventually defeated the Medes, and Cyrus became king.

During the course of the war, Cyrus had promoted Oibaras to general (στρατηγός), and it was Oibaras who ultimately placed the crown (κίδαρις) on Cyrus' head as Cyrus sat upon Astyages' throne. Oibaras was also appointed to oversee the removal of the captured treasures. In contrast to his doppelganger Belesys, who was charged with the same job after Sardanapalus' defeat deceived Arbakes (see chapter 4), there is no indication of any duplicity on Oibaras' part. He remained, at this point, the faithful and dutiful servant. Finally, various parts of the account as preserved by Nicolaus echo the Persian assault on Greece in 480–479: Astyages' threats to his commanders of what they would suffer if they lost (§34), the deployment of troops to kill any of their comrades who fled the battle (§42), and the wealth the Persians gained from the defeat of the Medes (§45).

Cyrus' Conquest of Astyages—The Nabonidus Chronicle

Beyond the testimony of Nabonidus' Sippar Cylinder (fig. 12, discussed above), another Near Eastern text offers important information on Cyrus' defeat of Astyages. The Nabonidus Chronicle, part of the Babylonian Chronicle series, is so named because most of the extant text concerns activities dating to Nabonidus' reign (556–539). The extant copy is thought to date to ca. 500 BCE, but there remain numerous uncertainties with regard to the chronicles' dates of composition and copying.[45] Cyrus' victory over the Medes is related in four lines of the chronicle (col. ii, lines 1–4), summarized as follows: Astyages and his army

attacked Cyrus, king of Anshan; Astyages' army rebelled, took him prisoner, and delivered him to Cyrus; Cyrus took and plundered Ecbatana and removed its treasures to Anshan. Though the rebellion of Astyages' troops, a prominent feature in the Herodotean version, is absent from the extant Ctesian tradition, the latter follows the Nabonidus Chronicle in stating that it was Astyages who attacked Cyrus. The chronicle also describes, in more detail, Cyrus' conquest of Babylonia and entry into Babylon (col. iii, lines 10–28), at several points portraying him as appropriately observing cultic rites in the traditional manner of Babylonian kings. The chronicle supplies no information about the preliminaries to the conflict with Astyages, but Media was not Babylonia, and the chronicle's focus is on the latter.

Photius' Version

Nicolaus' excerpt ends with Astyages' defeat and flight to Ecbatana and its consequences, foremost among which was the defection to Cyrus of several peoples ruled by the Medes. Defectors included Artasyras, the ruler of the Hyrcanians, who is prominent later in the narrative. Photius continued the Ctesian Cyrus saga (F9), coincidentally or not, with a relatively smooth transition from Nicolaus' plot, though the latter's preserved excerpts are richer in detail. Photius, writing an epitome, took a different tone: terse, with more emphasis on what we would term historical events, as opposed to transmitting Ctesian narrative details that substantiate character development, though he was consistent in representing those aspects manifest in other transmitters. Photius also highlighted topics of interest to himself and his contemporaries, such as the prominence of eunuchs (see chapter 1).

Cyrus pursued Astyages to Ecbatana, where Astyages' daughter, Amytis, and her husband, Spitamas, hid him. To force Astyages' hand, Cyrus threatened to have Oibaras torture Astyages' children and grandchildren. (Cyrus himself would not do this, of course; rather, this was a job for the right-hand man, Oibaras.) Oibaras placed Astyages in fetters, but Cyrus subsequently released and honored him as a father. Astyages soon became Cyrus' father-in-law, when Cyrus, having killed Spitamas for lying, married Amytis. The epitome does not provide the necessary detail to contextualize the vicissitudes in Cyrus' attitude toward his former master turned rival, vanquished enemy, and father-in-law. Now wedded to Astyages' heir, Cyrus was legitimized as the king of the Medes. Upon hearing this news, the Bactrians voluntarily submitted.

Cyrus' campaigns after the conquest of the Medes—as well as those peoples who submitted voluntarily—were located primarily in northern Iran or Central Asia (F9 §1–7). Whether this catalogue reflects the actual historical progression of

his conquests is an open question, sensible as the assumption may seem.[46] As noted previously, setting the *Persica*'s action in these far-flung and exotic regions—from the perspective of the Greeks—allowed Ctesias to set his work apart from that of his rivals. Photius also included brief accounts of the captures of the westerly regions of Sardis and Babylon, which were presumably more extensively covered in the original. The proportional space given to those events compared with Cyrus' northern and eastern conquests is impossible to determine. Ctesias related a victory over the Saka (Scythians), which included the capture of their king, Amorges, and resulted in the defeat of Cyrus by Amorges' wife, Sparetha, a warrior queen on the model of Semiramis or Zarinaia. After an exchange of prisoners, some sort of accommodation must have been made—Photius did not relay the details—because Amorges became a staunch ally.

In the campaign against Sardis, clever Oibaras came to the forefront once more. His stratagem of using wooden dummies as decoys facilitated the capture of the city (F9 §4).[47] Croesus sought refuge in the temple of Apollo but was captured. He escaped the bonds put upon him three times, to the evident consternation of Cyrus and Oibaras. Taken to the palace and bound even more securely, Croesus again mysteriously shed his bonds, to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning. Even in the face of these divine portents and interventions, Cyrus was loath to release him. When he did so, however, he treated Croesus kindly and gave him a city named Barene, near Ecbatana, to rule.

The epitome next records that Cyrus dispatched the eunuch Petesakas (see chapter 1, no. 5) to bring Astyages to him, as both Cyrus and Amytis were eager to see him. Oibaras, however, induced Petesakas to abandon Astyages in the desert to starve to death. No reason is given for Oibaras' action. If there is any parallel with the murder of the Babylonian seer, Oibaras may have perceived a threat (real or imagined) to Cyrus or to himself from Astyages, but this is speculation: the account is too telescoped to discern his motivation. Once the matter was discovered, Amytis punished Petesakas with a cruel death by torture. Oibaras chose suicide by starvation—on parallel with the fate he arranged for Astyages—rather than face the same punishment as Petesakas. He clearly did not take seriously Cyrus' avowals that nothing untoward would happen to him. This is a curious and somewhat anticlimactic end for a character so vitally involved in the action. The demands and pressures from Amytis that presumably led to Oibaras' suicide, despite Cyrus' assurances, are not extant. As Amytis proved a forerunner to the ruthless and relentless Parysatis who appears later in Ctesias' account, it may be that clever Oibaras had no illusions about his fate and took it upon himself to circumvent a worse one at Amytis' hands. Ctesias' readers would certainly have seen what was coming.

Cyrus' final campaign (F9 §7) was against the Derbices, ruled by Amoraios.[48] During the battle, in which Amoraios' forces were supplemented by elephants, Cyrus was wounded and taken from the field. A large cavalry force led by Amorges rushed to Cyrus' aid and saved the day. Cyrus died from his wound shortly thereafter, but not before making arrangements for his succession. Cambyses was named king. Cyrus' other son, Tanyoxarkes, was named governor of the Bactrians, Chorasmians, Parthians, and Carmanians and freed from the obligation to pay tribute. Spitakes and Megabernes, Amytis' sons by her first husband, Spitamas, were made satraps of the Derbices and the Bactrians, respectively. Cyrus then commanded them to obey their mother and to maintain friendly relations with Amorges. Ctesias counted Cyrus' reign at thirty years,[49] and this ended the *Persica*'s eleventh book.

4 The Inverted Hero's Many Faces

A number of stories transmitted from the *Persica* demonstrate Ctesias' adaptation of Near Eastern legends: the legends of Arbakes and Belesys, Parsondes and Nanaros, and Zarinaia and Stryangaios, as well as the historical saga of Megabyzus, a prominent fifth-century Persian nobleman. These stories are not often treated at any length in modern works. Although, on the whole, they fit a Greek milieu better than a Near Eastern one, they have their origins in Mesopotamian and Persian oral traditions. Reading through a Near Eastern lens connects them to the case studies discussed earlier in this book.

Ctesias' History of Assyria

The extent of Ctesias' treatment of Assyrian history is unknown. Diodorus' assessment of the *longue durée* from the death of Semiramis to its last king (F1b), Sardanapalus, is dismissive: "nothing worthy of memory" (τὸ μηδὲν . . . μνήμης ἄξιον, Diod. Sic. 2.22.1) was done by any of the other kings. The one exception noted was the sending of an Assyrian contingent to aid the Trojans, under the command of Memnon, son of Tithonus, who was general (στρατηγός) of Persia. Diodorus relays Tithonus' credentials, along with two notable construction works attributed to his son Memnon: the citadel at Susa (purportedly still standing until the Achaemenid period) and a great road. Such works, as has been noted several times, were expected of Near Eastern rulers. Darius I, for example, undertook a massive building program at Susa, a center for Elamite kings' construction activities for centuries before. The so-called Susa foundation charter (DSf) contains a detailed accounting of the materials used to construct his palace at Susa, as well as the multitude of subject places and peoples who furnished the resources and the expertise: gold from Lydia and Bactria, silver and ebony from Egypt, ivory from India, and the list goes on (DSf §8–13).[1] It was just this sort of cosmopolitan

perspective—reflective of the reach of the King's authority—that Ctesias applied to his fantasies of a far-flung Assyrian Empire that took part in the Trojan war.

After an excursus on Memnon's origins, vis-à-vis a conflicting account given by the Ethiopians, Diodorus again invoked the royal records (ταῖς βασιλικαῖς ἀναγραπαῖς, Diod. Sic. 2.22.5) as Ctesias' source, a problematic claim (see the introduction to this volume). Ctesias delineated an Assyrian rule lasting thirty generations, from Ninos to Sardanapalus (inclusive), and more than 1,300 years (Diod. Sic. 21.1.8, 2.28.8). From Ctesias' time, 1,300 years stretches back to what we term the Old Babylonian period, within a couple of generations of the floruit of the Old Assyrian kingdom under Shamshi-Adad I (1813–1781 BCE).[2] Thirteen hundred years is thus a not unreasonable stab at chronological placement of Assyria as a significant power in Greater Mesopotamia.

Reconciling thirty generations presents more of a problem. Counting backward from the last king, Ashur-uballit II (r. 612–609), takes Ctesias only into the Middle Assyrian period and Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1115–1076). The thirty-kings count does not imply thirty full generations, as each king would have reigned for less than seventeen years on average, and succession did not always proceed from father to son or the generational equivalent. On the other hand, Ctesias' thirty generations over 1,300 years necessitates an average reign of slightly over forty-three years. This is hardly an impossible figure, but a string of thirty long-lived sovereigns strains an already meager credibility. Few would use a list from Ctesias for reconstructing Assyrian history, and these numbers should be considered simply an expression of great antiquity—another facet of Ctesias' own claims to authority.

After the work of campaign, conquest, and construction by Ninos and Semiramis, their son Ninyas established a pattern of idleness, luxury, and effeminacy. This pattern persisted until the downfall of the Assyrian Empire. The trope reinforced the Greek-barbarian dichotomy for Ctesias' Greek readers. Ninyas and his successors were surrounded by concubines and eunuchs, and seen by no one else. The king had, through his supremacy, access to every sort of luxury and depravity, with the implication that he engaged in all of them. That the Assyrian rulers were feminized by this access and excess is not a coincidence in the narrative. The conjunction was a not-so-subtle commentary on the sexual degeneracy of the Assyrian monarchs, reflecting Greek stereotypical views of their contemporary world-rulers, the Achaemenid kings. Skewed portrayals of elaborate wardrobes, cosmetics, and other royal accoutrements—so fundamental to the pageantry of the Achaemenid court and the majesty of the king[3]—readily evoked Greek ideas about femininity and, thus, inferiority. The ubiquity of concubines and eunuchs throughout the *Persica*'s narrative continually implied sexual licentiousness and lasciviousness that crossed gender lines, and it threw into sharper relief the contrast between the

Greek masculine ideal and the enervated, feminized Persians or Assyrians or Medes.

Ninyas instituted the practice of stationing troops and commanders outside the city in encampments and rotating them on an annual basis. The rotation offered the perception of limitless forces at the disposal of the Assyrian king, while the former practice limited fraternization among commanders, thus reducing, if not eliminating, opportunities to plan a rebellion.[4] These strategies served to increase the mystique of the king, whose removal from sight made him tantamount to a god (F1b, Diod. Sic. 2.21.7). This portrayal runs counter to Assyrian royal inscriptions, wherein the king's august status was immanent, a visible manifestation. His person radiated an aura, the *melammu*: an awe-inspiring and terrifying radiance associated with gods and kings.[5] There were several occasions (public rituals, festivals, parades) where the Assyrian king would have been visible and his aura manifest. A more fearful component of the aura was associated with the king's leadership of military expeditions. His presence and visibility at the forefront of battle, crushing his enemies, is a standard feature in the royal annals, regardless of the reality of the situation on the ground. In one of the earliest examples in the literary tradition, Gilgamesh's mere appearance on the city wall overcame friend and foe alike, and his opponent immediately surrendered.[6]

An inscription of Ashurbanipal offers a parallel for the cloistered king in a seer's elaborate dream before the battle of Tell Tuba in 653. In the dream,

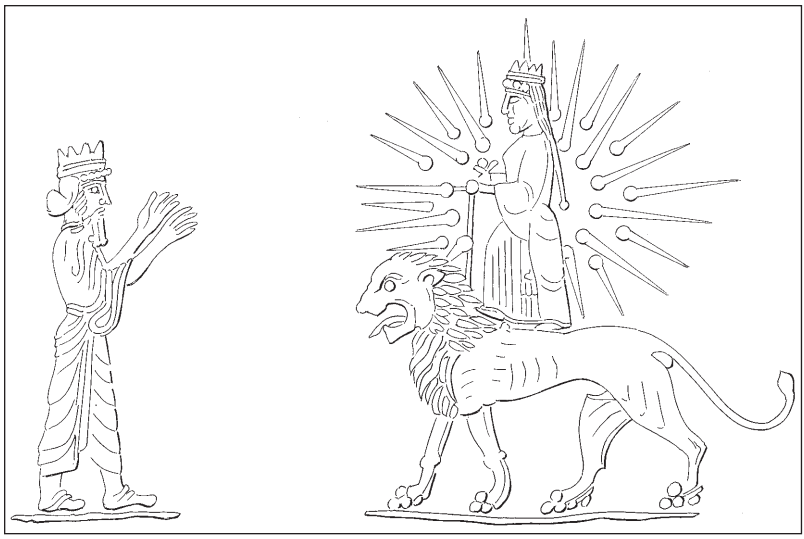

Figure 13. King approaching Anahita on a lion, from a fourth-century cylinder seal housed in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Drawing courtesy of Tessa Rickards.

Ashurbanipal's protector Ishtar insisted that he remain at home in his palace, feasting and enjoying music ("Eat bread! Drink fine beer! Be joyous! Revere my divinity!"), while she overcame his enemy, Te'umman, the king of Elam.[7] The ritualistic and prophetic elements in this passage emphasize an impassioned relationship between king and goddess, with allusions to Ishtar's ecstatic rites (e.g., lines 26–34). The ecstatic elements of such a cult could have easily fired Ctesias' imagination and led him to focus on the potential for sexual promiscuity, cross-dressing, and other activities associated with the feminine by Greeks.[8] Yet the goddess who represented the eternal feminine and sexuality was, as we have seen, also a warrior goddess, appealed to by kings throughout Mesopotamian history to destroy their enemies. Ishtar's combination of feminine and masculine characteristics underlay her special place as companion, protector, and even mother of the king, especially when juxtaposed with the hypermasculine context of the Assyrian annals, which primarily glorify war, hunting, and construction. The goddess's multivalence presented numerous possibilities within Assyrian practice itself, permeating the cultic elements that survived and were adapted, in various forms (the written canon, oral tradition, art), into the Achaemenid court. Such seeming paradoxes may have seemed jarring, and thus fascinating, to Ctesias' audience, but they were right at home within their Near Eastern context. The emotive element is not unusual.[9] It is an open question, of course, to what extent such rites and practices continued into the Achaemenid period, but the lines of continuity are inescapable.

The contemporary (to Ctesias) worship of Anahita, promulgated in particular by Artaxerxes II, intersected the Ishtar cult, with whom Anahita was syncretized. Anahita was a fertility deity associated in Iranian tradition with water. A well-known representation shows Anahita standing upon the back of a lion, approached by the king, presumably Artaxerxes II, in worshipful pose (fig. 13). Several eastern Mediterranean fertility goddesses, including Ishtar, are shown in similar context with big cats (fig. 14). Artaxerxes II refers to Anahita in his inscriptions, an anomaly in the Achaemenid royal corpus, and a passage from Berossus testifies to his

Figure 14. Ishtar as goddess of war standing on a crouching lion, approached by worshipper. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal, late eighth century. Werner Forman Archive / British Museum, London. Photograph: HIP / Art Resource, NY.

promulgation of her worship through the erection of her statues in several cities.[10] There is clearly something going on here, but was it a religious reform? The evidence is slim, and the mentions of Anahita in the royal inscriptions are exclusive to Artaxerxes II.

Nevertheless, with this effort occurring in or near the time of Ctesias' floruit, the Cnidian appears to have found himself in the midst of some significant religious developments. Plutarch (*Art.* 3.2) placed Artaxerxes' enthronement at Pasargadae in the temple "of the warlike goddess" (θεᾶς πολεμικῆς), whom Plutarch identified with Athena. Clearly this was Anahita. In describing the investiture ceremony, Plutarch's implication was that all Achaemenid kings did the same thing at the same place, re-creating a rite instituted by Cyrus. Does this imply a consistent link between king and Anahita for well over a century? Or is Plutarch's description anachronistically applied? Both of Artaxerxes II's parents, Darius II and Parysatis, were half-Babylonian, offspring of different concubines of Artaxerxes I. Assyrian and Babylonian influences on Achaemenid court and ideology were pervasive, and Artaxerxes II's familial heritage reinforced these connections. In other words, multiple venues for knowledge of the Ishtar cult and its influence on the worship of Anahita persisted.

Arbakes and Belesys: The Overthrow of the Assyrian Empire

Like his version of Cyrus' origins and rise to power, Ctesias' rendering of Median history is completely at odds with the tradition found in Herodotus, Xenophon, and other Greek writers. Why? The easiest answer remains the imperative to "correct" Herodotus; Ctesias, via a different version, asserted his authority and, therefore, the primacy of his *Persica*. (The numerous aspersions cast on his reliability suggest that it did not take: see the introduction.) Ctesias relayed a different dynastic line—including different names for most of the Median kings—and incorporated several storylines not found in Herodotus or in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Ctesias' account of Arbakes' overthrow of the Assyrian Empire contains numerous parallels with the story of Cyrus and Oibaras' overthrow of the Median Empire.[11] The pattern is close enough for us to recognize the same structural framework, though the particulars diverge in several ways, suggestive of discrete traditions that Ctesias wove into his own narrative.

Sardanapalus, the last Assyrian king, exemplified effeminacy and decadence (fig. 15). He "lived the life of a woman" (βίον ἔζησε γυναικός), whitening his face and body with cosmetics, covering himself with lotions to make his skin more delicate. He indulged in food, drink, and sexual pleasure with men and women

Figure 15. Eugene Delacroix, *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photograph by Hervé Lewandowski. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

(F1b, Diod. Sic. 2.23). He was degeneracy incarnate, not only for Ctesias but for many subsequent writers as well. This concatenation of the feminine and the lurid spurred the Mede Arbakes to revolt. Once he had arranged access to the cloistered Sardanapalus by way of a eunuch, what Arbakes witnessed appalled him and strengthened his resolve for rebellion.[12] Thus the Mede Arbakes, who was "surpassing in virtue and splendor of spirit,"[13] became the foil to Sardanapalus. Arbakes is introduced in the context of his command of the rotating Median force sent to Nineveh, but no particulars about his parentage or origins beyond his Median ethnicity are preserved. His Babylonian counterpart Belesys,[14] a renowned seer and diviner, foretold that Arbakes would become king. That prediction motivated Arbakes to lay the groundwork among his fellow commanders for a rebellion that would include Medes, Persians, Babylonians, and Arabs, among others.

Inclusion of Arabs and Persians in the overthrow of Assyria is not easily reconciled with the extant record. Near Eastern sources on the fall of Assyria, including our main source—the so-called Fall of Nineveh Chronicle[15]—do not provide

specific information on the contingents that fought with the Medes and Babylonians. Arabs and Persians were both well known to the Assyrians, however. Among the varied extant evidence is a loyalty oath between Ashurbanipal and the Qedar tribe, as well as a record of a campaign to punish their subsequent failure to uphold the oath.[16] Persians from Fars appear sporadically in letters and royal inscriptions dating from the late eighth century onward, primarily in texts from Ashurbanipal's reign, including the much-discussed reference to Kurash, king of Parsumash, who paid homage to Ashurbanipal sometime after the latter's ruinous campaigns against Elam in the early and mid-640s.[17] The extent of their involvement, if any, in the campaigns against Assyria in the 610s is unknown; the only extant records of their participation come from the Greek tradition.

Sardanapalus, discovering his inner Ishtar, took a surprisingly aggressive stance against the rebels, at least compared with his characterization thus far in the transmitted text. After three battles the rebels' situation was bleak. Arbakes was wounded, and despite his individual heroism, his allies had lost heart.[18] Belesys offered hope based on positive omens, fulfilled five days later with the arrival of a large Bactrian host to join the rebellion—an anachronistic development that allowed Ctesias once again to highlight the eastern portions of the (Achaemenid) Empire in his narrative. In the meantime, Sardanapalus reverted to hedonism and self-indulgence and distributed great quantities of food and wine for a feast. The outcome followed the well-established literary pattern—the Ctesian approach was not always subtle. When the rebels discerned that the Assyrian army was drunk, they attacked and routed it, drove the remnants into Nineveh, and besieged the city.

Sardanapalus' brother-in-law Salameines[19] engaged the rebels directly, while Sardanapalus devoted his attention to the defense of the city. After losing two battles outside the city, Salameines was slain, and the Assyrian army was mostly destroyed. Sardanapalus sent three sons and two daughters to a certain Cotta, the most loyal of his subjects, the governor of Paphlagonia.[20] Sardanapalus then dispatched messages summoning additional forces from his vassals, a close echo of Herodotus' account of the overthrow of Croesus by Cyrus. A prophecy maintained that Nineveh would not fall unless the river turned against it. The extant account reveals no more about the summoned reinforcements, though the siege was protracted for three years, at which point heavy rains caused the Euphrates to flood (Ctesias famously placed Nineveh on the wrong river here[21]), and a large section of the city wall collapsed. Sardanapalus took this as the fulfillment of the prophecy. He shut himself within the palace—along with all his treasures, concubines, and eunuchs—and burned everything. Echoes of the Shamash-shum-ukin rebellion of 652–648, which included the Assyrian sack of Babylon and Shamash-shum-ukin's

immolation, have long been noted; that story is also preserved in an Aramaic version.[22]

Nicolaus preserves an account of Belesys' dream from the time when he and Arbakes were serving in the annual rotation of subject troops around Nineveh (F1pε*). In the dream, a horse took chaff to a sleeping Arbakes, for which another horse chided him. The horse carrying the chaff responded that this man, Arbakes, would soon rule all.[23] When Belesys awoke, he went with Arbakes on a walk along the Tigris beneath the city wall of Nineveh. Belesys tested Arbakes to gauge his willingness to seize power from the Assyrians. Belesys first asked what Arbakes would give him as the bearer of good news if Sardanapalus were to make Arbakes satrap of Cilicia. Arbakes, showing the humility often associated with Ctesian protagonists, demurred but, when pressed, promised a not-insignificant post to Belesys as reward. This line of questioning progressed until Belesys eventually explained the dream and its significance and, in the process, secured his promise to make Belesys satrap of Babylonia if Arbakes became king.

This rhetorical episode closely parallels the sequence in which Oibaras encouraged a reluctant Cyrus to rebel against Asytages (see chapter 3). Cyrus directed the dialogue's flow in that case: he was not angling for status (that was a given) but testing Oibaras' level of buy-in. The Greek word Belesys used to describe himself, τῷ εὐαγγελιζομένῳ ("bearing good news," F1pε*, Nicolaus), invokes a similar meaning that is attributed to Oibaras' name in the Cyrus saga (ἀγαθάγγελος, F8d* §13, Nicolaus). The connection with horses in both sequences strengthens the parallel. Connections between the horse and royalty run through Achaemenid tradition and ideology and are prominent in Achaemenid royal inscriptions, where "good horses" (the adjective *uvaspa-*, applied to the word for "kingdom") are an aspect of Ahuramazda's beneficence to the king (DSf §3, DZc §1, etc.).[24]

Mesopotamian myth and wisdom literature contain numerous antecedents that could have influenced the dialogue in Ctesias. The exchange between Ashurbanipal and Ishtar in the dream sequence discussed above is just one example. Enkidu's strident exhortation of Gilgamesh before Humbaba (see chapter 3) is another. However, since it is Nicolaus who preserves both dialogues (Arbakes-Belesys, Cyrus-Oibaras), it is natural to assume that they are his creations, or perhaps his adaptations from Ctesias' original.[25] In other words, Nicolaus may have put his own stamp on the words exchanged by the principals in each episode, based on material from the original *Persica*.

Diodorus' version (F1b) ends the tale, as we have it. After Sardanapalus' defeat, Belesys was appointed governor of Babylon.[26] He secured Arbakes' permission to move the ashen ruins of Sardanapalus' palace to Babylon in order to fulfill a vow to Belus (or Bel, meaning Marduk). What Arbakes did not know is that one of

Sardanapalus' eunuchs (see chapter 1, no. 25) had escaped to Belesys and told him about the massive treasures heaped up in the palace by Sardanapalus and subsequently consumed in the fire. Belesys took the ruins in order to extract the gold and silver. When the truth was discovered, Belesys stood trial, with his fellow commanders as judges, and was sentenced to death. Arbakes countermanded the sentence—desirous to display his clemency and magnanimity—and commuted the penalty. He restored Belesys to his position and allowed him to keep the treasure, on the argument that his previous service outweighed his subsequent crime. This makes the reader recall that very custom of the Persians, as described by Herodotus (1.137.1), which forbade the king to execute a person for a single offense.

Parsondes and Nanaros

The saga of Parsondes is set during the reign of Artaios—the Median king in the fifth generation after Arbakes, according to the Ctesian chronology. This is the first "feature-length" story featuring a Persian in the extant *Persica*. There are extant two discrete parts of what was clearly a much longer treatment in the original. The part transmitted by Diodorus (F5) preserves Parsondes' revolt, in conjunction with the Cadusians, against the Medes, on account of his having been "aggrieved by the king in a certain judgment,"[27] whose particulars Diodorus does not relate. The rebellion seems a natural progression from the part of the story preserved by Nicolaus, which relates the scandalous tale of Parsondes and the Babylonian Nanaros (F6b*). At the point where Nicolaus' account breaks off, it is clear that Parsondes remained deeply unsatisfied with the situation, as the dastardly Nanaros had escaped his just desserts. There is no explicit link to the material preserved by Diodorus, but the connection seems a natural one, and so it is interpreted here. Dissatisfaction with Nanaros' penalty impelled Parsondes to revolt against the king. In other words, Nicolaus preserved an earlier part of the story.

With Nicolaus' version, we join the story of Parsondes *in medias res*.[28] Parsondes appears as a sort of Greek Hercules, a Mesopotamian Ninurta, or an antecedent to Iranian Rostam. He was a paradigmatic hero, admired for his courage and intelligence, a friend of the king, and an influential member of the royal council. Renowned for his virtue and strength, he was honored among the Persians for his good counsel and his good looks, as well as his proficiency in hunting and in combat, in a close fight as well as fighting from both chariot and horse (F6b* §1, Nicolaus, and F5, Diod. Sic. 2.33.1). Such descriptions are, of course, found frequently in the heroic lexicon. Applied here, they bring to mind not only the Assyrian kings as described in inscriptions and as portrayed in the palace reliefs but also the idealized Persian king as a wise dispenser of justice, skilled in battle and in the hunt. Among

other places, these qualities are trumpeted by Darius in his tomb inscriptions at Naqsh-i Rustam: strong body, good warrior, steadfast intelligence, accomplished on horse and with bow and spear (DNb §2g–i).[29] The image is ubiquitous. Two of many examples appear at the Palace of Darius at Persepolis (fig. 16) and in the official archives (fig. 17).

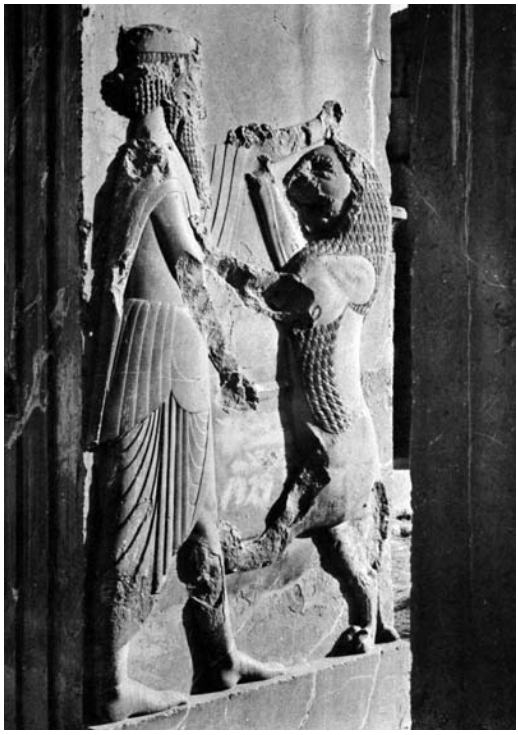

Figure 16 (*left*). Darius I as royal hero, Palace of Darius, Persepolis. From E. Schmitt 1953, plate 146a. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

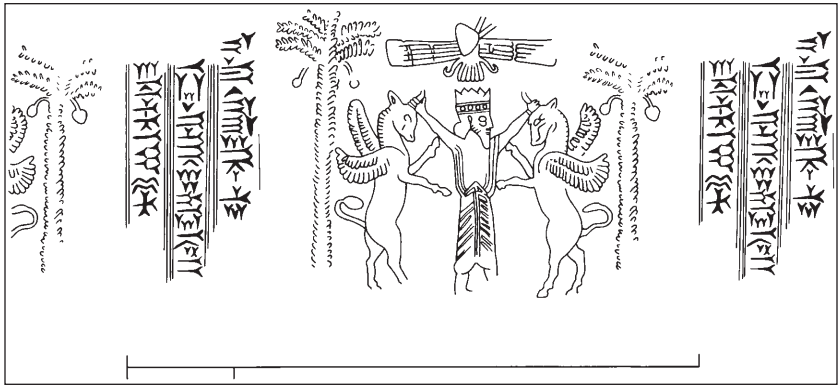

Figure 17 (*below*). Darius I as royal hero, Persepolis, ca. 500 BCE. The fragmentary trilingual inscription reads, "I am Darius . . ." From Garrison and Root 2001, 68–70. Collated line drawing of PFS 7* from the Persepolis Fortification Archive. Courtesy of the Persepolis Seal Project and the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project.

Royal qualities serve both to highlight Parsondes' exceptionality and to heighten the contrast with his forthcoming humiliation and feminization. This dichotomy fits in well with Ctesias' interest in inversion. Parsondes' antagonist was the Babylonian Nanaros, the effeminate and conniving governor of Babylonia. Nanaros' characterization is similar to that of several eunuchs in the *Persica*, though there is no indication that he was a castrato, and his portrayal is also a throwback to Sardanapalus. Throughout this stage in the extant *Persica*, the antithetical portrayals of the manly Medes and Persians and the effeminate Assyrians and Babylonians offer a direct parallel to the Greek-Persian antithesis found later in the *Persica* and, indeed, as a basic topos in Greek literature. For Ctesias, the Medes and Persians start out like the Greeks but end up like the Assyrians.

Parsondes' antipathy was founded not upon any ill deed or ill will on Nanaros' part (none that is preserved, at least) but simply on the fact that the latter represented—in his appearance and in his lifestyle—the antithesis of the manliness Parsondes embodied. Parsondes insisted that Artaios remove Nanaros from his position and grant the office instead to Parsondes. Artaios did not acquiesce, and Nanaros plotted his revenge for Parsondes' attempted usurpation. He promised a large reward if any of the merchants who accompanied the army would bring him Parsondes as a prisoner. During the course of a hunt, Parsondes was separated from his party and arrived alone in Babylon. The fact that his capture occurred within the context of the hunt—a heroic, masculine activity—reinforces the coming inversion to the feminine. This was further accentuated by the change in setting from the countryside (suitable for the rugged Persians[30]) to the effeminate and enervating city. The merchants' involvement is curious. Parsondes found himself in Nanaros' lair (i.e., Babylon), where he was captured not by force but by guile. The merchants promised falsely to deliver the game he had caught to the king and inform Parsondes' servants of his whereabouts. Then they plied him with food, wine, and women. Parsondes, drunk and weakened, became easy prey.[31]

They delivered him to Nanaros, who disparaged him and took the opportunity to recall the prestige given to the Babylonians by the Median Arbakes—a tradition, in Nanaros' view, wisely upheld by Artaios. Questioned by Nanaros about the source of his animosity, Parsondes defiantly pointed to the distinction between masculine (Parsondes) and feminine (Nanaros) and proclaimed himself "more useful" (ὠφελιμώτερος) to the king. Nanaros mocked him for being done in by his stomach and genitals, tricked and caught by the very type of man that he reviled—so much for his usefulness. Vowing to Bel (Marduk) and Mullittu (Ishtar),[32] Nanaros summoned the eunuch in charge of the singing girls and instructed him to feminize Parsondes. The masculine Parsondes underwent a social (if not literal) transformation from man into woman, becoming his feminized opposite, as proficient in stereotypically feminine skills as he was in the masculine.

Parsondes was shaved and pumiced, bathed in egg yolk, and subjected to intensive makeup and hair treatments. He was taught to sing and play the cither and consigned to dress like, and to live with, the slave girls who were the musicians in Nanaros' court. He not only looked the part but became so thoroughly adept at these new skills that he surpassed the rest of the singing girls in beauty and accomplishment. This raises many questions if one is inclined to see more in this part of the story than a humorous anecdote. Inversion remains a prominent theme and is even more pronounced when Parsondes is redeemed after a long interval of acting the part of a woman. The gender reversal has numerous parallels in Greek myth and legend, notably Hercules' life as a plaything of the Lydian queen Omphale.

Musicians, dancers, and other entertainers of both sexes, all subordinate to a male chief musician (Akkadian *nargallu*, a high official), were a prominent part of Mesopotamian court life. Within the preserved correspondence from Mari (eighteenth century BCE) dealing with matters of bureaucracy and organization may be found information on their recruitment, numbers, and training. Some letters allude to rivalries among individuals, associations with wantonness, and other very human complaints and foibles within a highly charged political atmosphere. These situations were hardly unique to Yasmah-Addu's court, and several examples may be found in later texts, including some from seventh-century Assyria.[33] Tradition and his contemporary experience no doubt offered Ctesias numerous parallels and possibilities for inspiration.

What was the reader supposed to think about Parsondes' transformation? How deep did it go? And what were its ramifications? He was not castrated. Despite his feminized appearance and lifestyle, Parsondes never relinquished his hope for vengeance, a motivating impetus in the continued storyline. He had been consistently described in terms of his manliness and vigor, and his entrapment entailed extensive sexual activity. The reader may wonder how he passed his time in captivity, living among throngs of women. Did Nicolaus perhaps leave out some of the more salacious details from Ctesias' original? Was the reader's imagination meant to extend beyond the text into the implications of Parsondes' opportunities? Or was the reader to assume that Parsondes was too busy honing his feminine skills to be interested in anything else? Or too obsessed with vengeance? The *Persica*'s Greek audience would have recalled heroic sexual feats from their own traditions, such as that of Hercules and the daughters of Thespius. A Near Eastern context also offers several possibilities, including Enkidu's sexual marathon with Shamhat, which both enervates and socializes him. Ctesias himself may have been influenced by this and a number of other explicit poems and stories from Babylonian tradition,[34] another possible example of the multivalent influences on his work.

King Artaios, meanwhile, had lost hope. Despite searches and offers of rewards, he received no word of Parsondes' fate and thus assumed that he had been killed

during the hunt. After seven years as a feminized court musician, Parsondes seized a chance. He bribed one of Nanaros' eunuchs (see chapter 1, no. 27) to flee to the Medes and relay Parsondes' fate to Artaios. Artaios rejoiced to hear that Parsondes was alive but at the same time was astounded that such a fate could have befallen such a great man, the implication being that such hypermasculinity could not possibly be suborned. Artaios' first messenger to Nanaros was rebuffed. A second one, of much higher rank, compelled Nanaros through threat of force: Nanaros would be seized by the belt and hauled off for execution if he did not comply.[35] Nanaros was cowed but asked for the opportunity to defend his actions. He also invited the messenger to a feast at which the singing girls performed. When the messenger was asked to indicate the most pleasing one (indeed, the one whom he would choose as a sexual partner), he chose none other than Parsondes. Flabbergasted, the messenger echoed Artaios' wonderment that such a man could bear such treatment. The king's incredulity was magnified upon Parsondes' return to Susa,[36] when Artaios witnessed the transformation with his own eyes.

Asked by the king how he had borne such treatment, Parsondes invoked necessity (ἀνάγκη) as more powerful than the gods. He dutifully attributed his persistence first to the desire to see his king once again, and second to his desire for vengeance, which he wished to accomplish through the king and which he asked the king to sanction. Vengeance as a motive is straightforward enough. The desire to see the king, to be in his presence, is a common theme in Near Eastern texts. It was a great honor, sometimes bestowed by the king himself: "Let me do my servant a favor . . . as long as he is in Assyria, let him be near me."[37] The level of obsequiousness generally depends on context (e.g., formulae used in royal correspondence are quite deferential) as well as the social level of the king's petitioner. Invocation of divine blessings is a variation of the grandiose epithets and qualities typically attributed to the king. Frequently the author assured the king that he would die for him.[38] In light of the centrality of the king in these cultures, such sentiments are not surprising, and the phenomenon continued into the Achaemenid period. Ctesias could not have entered the court without breathing that very air. Within the *Persica*, Parsondes is not the prototypical court functionary, of course, but his expression of fealty highlights the ideological underpinnings of Achaemenid rule. Even for members of the elite, certain protocols and expectations, especially in regard to public form and function, applied in their relationships to royalty.

Parsondes soon regained his former appearance, and by implication full masculinity. He accompanied Artaios to Babylon in order to confront Nanaros. The king ruled that Parsondes' case was stronger, not least because he sought justice through the king—protocol must be observed, as noted above—and not individually, as Nanaros had. Nanaros, in fear for his life, sought the intervention of the

powerful eunuch Mitraphernes (see chapter 1, no. 3), whom he bribed to intercede on his behalf and through whom he offered extensive recompense both to Parsondes and to the king. Mitraphernes persuaded the king, but Parsondes expressed disgust at the influence of gold and the idea of accepting it as recompense for his ordeal. Nicolaus' account ends with an allusion to Parsondes' vengeance both on Mitraphernes and on Nanaros; the particulars are not preserved. Extremely condensed references in the *Suda* (ε1604, σ1753 = F6c* and F6d*) to Parsondes' careful monitoring of his drinking in the context of an excessive banquet suggest that he may have inflicted a trap similar to the one with which Nanaros ensnared him.[39]

As noted above, Nicolaus' excerpt from the *Persica* is presumed to be the narrative precursor to the part of the saga preserved by Diodorus (2.32.5–33 = F5), which records Parsondes' defection to the Cadusians and rebellion against Artaios.[40] Diodorus attributed Parsondes' defection to a royal decision that distressed him and impelled him to defect to his sister's husband, a man of some importance among the Cadusians. In Diodorus' telescoped account, Parsondes persuaded the Cadusians to rebel and was appointed their general, an appointment prefaced upon the recurring theme of his valor and manly qualities, the same (rather generic) qualities emphasized in Nicolaus' excerpt. Parsondes' forces achieved great success against those of Artaios, and the Cadusians were freed from Median rule.

Parsondes in turn became their king. He continued to vent his spleen by raiding Median territory and, upon his deathbed, bequeathing to his Cadusian successors undying enmity against the Medes. This is Ctesias' explanation for the animosity between the two peoples, and it foreshadowed Cyrus' incorporation of Cadusian assistance in his rebellion against Astyages (see chapter 3).[41] All the usual caveats apply, but it is difficult not to see in Parsondes a literary precursor to Cyrus: in heroic and royal qualities, in an early career involving prominence among the Medes, and in the shift to antipathy against them. If more of the *Persica* were extant, one might even postulate a Ctesian commentary: Parsondes' feminization is an antecedent to what the Persians—especially in the persons of their kings—will become.

Zarinaia and Stryangaios: A Tragic Love Story

Stories about the Scythian warrior queen Zarinaia and the Mede Stryangaios had wide currency in antiquity, as a number of ancient sources testify. The one fragment attributable to a manuscript copy of the original *Persica* (POxy 2330) contains part of the tale.[42] Ctesias' story is summarized by Diodorus (2.34 = F5), who preserved the background and circumstances of their meeting. Nicolaus

(F8c*) transmitted the fullest account of the affair or, more accurately, of Stryangaios' unfulfilled desire; the excerpt picks up the story *in medias res*.

The story is set during the reign of the Median king Astibaras, the father of Astyages, thus, roughly two generations before the rise of Cyrus. The Parthians had revolted against the Medes and made an alliance with the Saka (Scythians) of Central Asia, initiating a long war that culminated eventually in a truce between Parthia and Media. Zarinaia is introduced as a sort of Semiramis-redux, a queen devoted to warfare, effective and energetic, outstanding in beauty and ability, driven to better the lot of her people (Diod. Sic. 2.34.3–4). Increasing prosperity was linked to the foundation of several new cities in a glowing, if again rather generic, assessment that recalls Semiramis' achievements, with particular attention to Zarinaia's intellect and cleverness. Diodorus ends his brief excerpt with a description of her tomb, built in the shape of a triangular pyramid and surmounted by a colossal statue. Zarinaia was accorded honors surpassing those of any of her predecessors.

The anonymous *Tractatus de mulieribus* (F7), citing Ctesias, identifies Zarinaia's first husband as her brother Kudraios.[43] After his death she married Mermeros, the king of the Parthians. Fragment 7 also refers to the war between the Medes and Parthians mentioned by Diodorus, in which the Stryangaios episode is set, although the author conflated Medes and Persians. Demetrius (F8a) identifies Stryangaios as a Mede, as does Nicolaus (F8c*) by implication. Fragment 7 has Stryangaios defeat Zarinaia in battle but spare her life. Tzetzes (F7b) and Demetrius add the detail that he unhorsed her. Fragment 7 offers further that Stryangaios was in turn captured by Mermeros,[44] and Zarinaia saved Stryangaios by killing her own husband. She subsequently made a treaty of friendship with Stryangaios, a sequence echoed in the *Suda* entry ε2864 (F7c*). Even stitching together these disparate pieces, all citing Ctesias as the source, the account is too telescoped to form a coherent narrative. The tale is clearly more romance than history. Demetrius and Nicolaus emphasize the tragic love between the two, or, rather, Stryangaios' consuming passion for Zarinaia, which matches the tone of POxy 2330.

Both POxy 2330 and the Nicolaus fragment accentuate the emotive component of Stryangaios' passion. Nicolaus uses an exaggerated term (ὑποστενάζω, "groaning softly"[45]) to describe his longing—not what one has come to expect from heroic figures elsewhere in the *Persica*. Ctesias' full characterization of Stryangaios is not extant, but it probably followed the pattern of the Parsondes-type, at least initially, since Stryangaios is hailed for his exploits in battle. In Greek myth this eros-stricken condition is generally associated with female characters, such as Myrrha or Phaedra. The motif is an early precursor to one commonly employed later in the Greek novel, and that Ctesias had enormous influence on that genre is taken for granted here.[46] Application of the motif to a male is another manifestation of

the inversion motif in the *Persica*, a feminization of another great hero of the Median-Persian tradition.

Stryangaios, beside himself with desire, confided his longing to a trusted eunuch (see chapter 1, no. 28), who served as both confidant and enabler. At the eunuch's urging, Stryangaios resolved to declare his longing to Zarinaia. Although she initially welcomed his interest, his timidity and hesitancy—traits not readily found among either Greek or Near Eastern heroes—came to the fore. Stryangaios dithered, sighed some more, and finally declared his burning passion for Zarinaia. But she, gently, rejected him: the pursuit of any affair would be shameful to them both, and in any event he was already married to the daughter of the Median king Astibaras. Rhotaia was purportedly far more beautiful, but clearly, to Stryangaios, Rhotaia was no Zarinaia. What Rhotaia lacked is not reported: perhaps she was simply not the hard-charging warrior woman by whom our Stryangaios was now smitten. Not incidentally, Zarinaia reminded Stryangaios that he must be a man—with the implication, of course, that he was not acting like one—and reject the temptation she posed to him. At no point did Zarinaia deny a mutual feeling, it must be said, but probity and propriety carried the day—at least on her side. Her modesty and nobility only fueled Stryangaios' desire. Unfulfilled and overcome with pathos, he returned to his trusty eunuch and made his final preparations, which included a love letter to Zarinaia.

POxy 2330 preserves the part of the manuscript with Stryangaios' letter, which may be compared with that preserved in the Nicolaus excerpt (F8c*; see above and the introduction). The letter emphasized the role and power of Eros, a bond heightened by their mutual rescue of one another: Stryangaios' withholding his own spear in battle, Zarinaia's killing her own husband and releasing Stryangaios from captivity. Stryangaios attributed Zarinaia's place and position, her current good fortune, to his decision to stay his hand; he attributed his own misery to her rejection, which left him, as he put it in his letter to her, already dead. He now planned to erase the formal distinction presented by his continuing to draw breath. He entrusted the letter to his eunuch and commanded him to deliver it after Stryangaios' death. The Nicolaus fragment breaks off at the point where Stryangaios has placed the letter under his pillow and asked for his sword in order to go to Hades bravely, like a man (ἀνδρείως). Are we to understand that this brings Stryangaios full circle, masculinized once again?[47] Perhaps, but whether the formulation was Nicolaus' own or derived unadulterated from Ctesias' original is impossible to discern. The fragment ends with ὁ δὲ εὐνοῦχος . . .

Near Eastern parallels for this vignette are elusive. There is a strong element of pathos in the king's dream exchange with Ishtar in the Ashurbanipal passage discussed above, as he approached her with tears flowing (Edition B, col. v, line 28),

but this describes a common, ritualistic phenomenon of abasement before the deity. The emotive component resonates, but, as discussed, the Ashurbanipal-Ishtar relationship in that text is that of a mother and son rather than lovers, and it is not clear how far that archetype extended into the Achaemenid period.

The Hero Megabyzus: A (Nearly) Contemporary Saga

In Photius' epitome (F13–14), the saga of Megabyzus dominates the extant narrative of the *Persica* for the mid-fifth century, which brings the audience to within roughly a generation of Ctesias. This is the closest that we get in the extant narrative to what may be termed a historical saga, one set within living memory and involving a member of the highest echelon of the Persian nobility.[48] Megabyzus, through descent and accomplishment, became a potential rival to the throne. He was the son of Zopyrus and grandson of the Megabyzus who was one of the Seven conspirators who overthrew the Magus in 522 and brought about the accession of Darius I. By the time Ctesias wrote the *Persica*, within two decades after the younger Megabyzus' death, Megabyzus (II) was a legendary figure in his own right. Perhaps it was Ctesias who made him a legend, at least in the Greek world.[49] As a descendant of one of the noblest Persian families, Megabyzus was a member of a select group from which the Achaemenid kings chose their highest officials. His prestige was enhanced by his marriage to Amytis, the daughter of Xerxes I (F13 §26). Their children could trace Achaemenid descent through Xerxes' mother Atossa back to Cyrus the Great (fig. 18).

It was in the subsequent generation that both the value and the threat represented by a person of such standing were truly manifested. In the aftermath of Artaxerxes I's death and Xerxes II's assassination, the importance of Achaemenid descent came to the forefront. Ochus' succession as Darius II marked the first time that a royal bastard took the throne, but he was still of Achaemenid descent, showing the staying power of that dynastic line. Megabyzus' sons could claim dynastic credentials that were similar, and arguably stronger (see below). That Ctesias is our main source for this period presents enormous difficulties, beyond the simple but important question of which elements of Megabyzus' story are historical, but this remains of only secondary concern here. Megabyzus was a hero in the mold of Parsondes. Ctesias or his source was clearly partial to Megabyzus, who was involved at every major incident recorded for the reigns of Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I—a roughly fifty-year career from the 480s into the 430s. Even though the narrative is termed here a "historical saga" by virtue of its chronological proximity to Ctesias' floruit, its literary qualities are paramount.

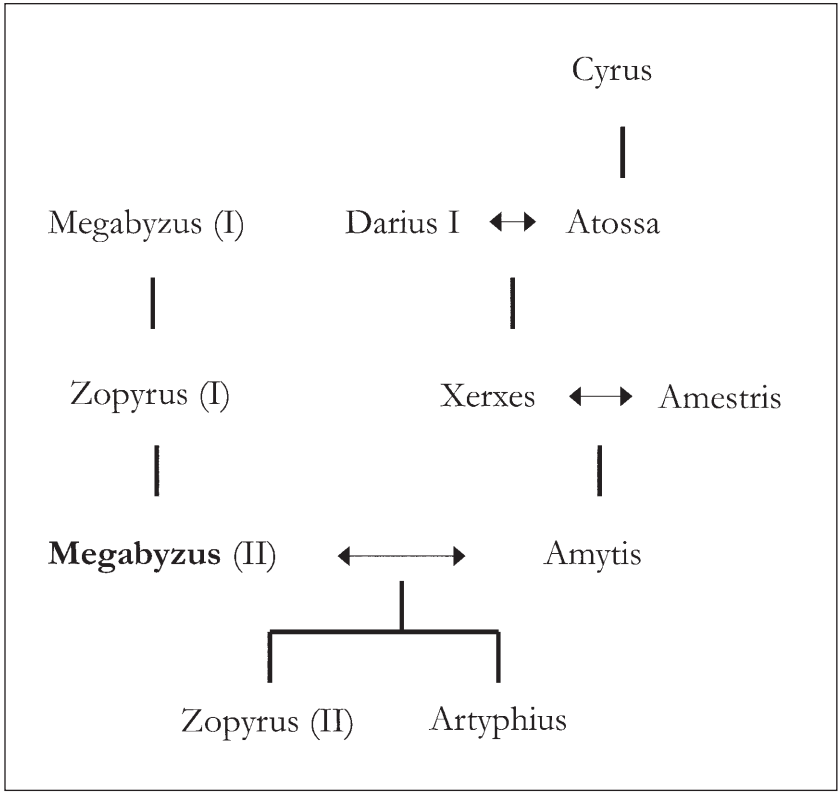

Figure 18. Family tree of Megabyzus (II).

Megabyzus put down the revolt of Babylon (dated by Babylonian documents to the late 480s) after the Babylonians murdered his father, Zopyrus, who is generically labeled a *strategos*. This suggests that Zopyrus was a military commander, though a role as governor (or satrap) is often understood, an extrapolation based on his own or his son's importance.[50] Richly rewarded by Xerxes for this service, Megabyzus also participated in the invasion of Greece. His nobility is emphasized at several points, as when he refused to pillage the sanctuary at Delphi—this would make him a sympathetic character in Greek eyes, that is, Ctesias' audience. Later he was aggrieved by the adultery of his wife, Amytis, the daughter of Xerxes. This is all tersely recorded in Photius' epitome (F13 §31–32), where the prominence given to Megabyzus' career suggests a proportionate attention to his character and actions in the original *Persica*:[51]

Megabyzus' career in the *Persica*

486–465: Reign of Xerxes
484: Babylonian rebellion
480–479: Xerxes' invasion of Greece
465–424: Reign of Artaxerxes I
mid-460s: Megabyzus assists in putting down revolt against Artaxerxes I
464–454: Inaros' rebellion in Egypt
(?): Megabyzus' rebellion
(?): Megabyzus' pardon, the lion hunt, and banishment
before 424: Megabyzus' death at age seventy-six, deeply mourned by Artaxerxes I

Amytis' indiscretions lend an element of pathos to the story. In those brief vignettes Megabyzus seems poised on the edge of emasculation, which may be considered a type of extended feminization in terms of Ctesias' thematic development. The full application of the motif is difficult to discern in the epitome, but the theme of feminization, as we have seen, was clearly one of Ctesias' favorites. Megabyzus' "feminization," if it may be termed such, was certainly a far cry from the more extreme sort inflicted on Parsondes. Notably, Megabyzus did not abandon Amytis but was further ennobled by his suffering and resolute morality.

Amytis' adultery spurred Megabyzus to consider, albeit briefly, joining a rebellion hatched by a certain Artabanus against Artaxerxes I, Megabyzus' brother-in-law. Instead, Megabyzus betrayed Artabanus and revealed the plot to Artaxerxes (F14 §34). Photius gives no indication that Megabyzus participated in or knew of Artabanus' initial machinations, which resulted in the assassination of Xerxes and the murder of Darius, Artaxerxes' brother. Much is clearly telescoped in the epitome, but Megabyzus is invariably cast in a positive light. He was severely wounded in the subsequent struggle against Artabanus and was only barely saved by the physician Apollonides.[52] Photius took the trouble to record that several members of the royal family were deeply concerned for his welfare: Amytis, his wife; King Artaxerxes; their sister, Rhodogune; and their mother, Amestris. That Photius repeated this list of intercessors suggests Megabyzus' esteem within the royal family and the nobility.[53] His standing did not suffer, despite his implied involvement in the initial plot.

Megabyzus played a prominent role in the campaign against the Egyptian rebel Inaros (464–454). After the death of the first commander, Achaemenides,[54] Artaxerxes' brother, Megabyzus led reinforcements and, in a heroic duel with Inaros, wounded the rebel in the thigh, causing him to retreat.[55] Inaros and his

Greek mercenaries were captured, after receiving surety from Megabyzus, who dutifully delivered Inaros to Artaxerxes. Thus, Megabyzus achieved a brilliant victory over a powerful threat, besting the enemy champion in single combat. Despite Artaxerxes' rage at the fate of Achaemenides, Megabyzus' guarantees kept Inaros safe—initially. Amestris, the queen mother, however, was not placated and insisted on vengeance for Achaemenides' death. Five years later Artaxerxes acquiesced to her lingering wrath. He delivered Inaros and the Greek captives to her, and all were impaled or decapitated (F14 §39)—a forerunner to the stories of Parysatis' revenge after Cunaxa (F16 §66–67, F26).

This breach of faith had a profound impact on Megabyzus, whose nobility Photius' epitome continues to emphasize. He withdrew to "his country" (i.e., Syria). This must refer to land granted to him by the King, since Megabyzus was, of course, not Syrian in origin. In light of his high rank, this grant could conceivably have been quite large, even an entire province, and it may have been in the family for more than a generation.[56] Significantly, Megabyzus first requested permission to return there.[57] His character remains consistent: the aggrieved hero, wronged by his king (compare Parsondes), chose rebellion to preserve his honor (F14 §41). In Ctesias' version, Megabyzus gathered a Greek force, a literary precursor to Cyrus the Younger's rebellion during Ctesias' own time. These Greek connections, presumably exaggerated, no doubt piqued the interest of Ctesias' Greek audience.

Megabyzus' sons, Zopyrus and Artyphius, played prominent roles in the rebellion. They are mentioned explicitly as having fought bravely (F14 §40), chips off the old block. The Persian commander Ousiris,[58] dispatched against the rebels, was initially wounded in the thigh by Megabyzus. This reiteration of the Egyptian rebel Inaros' fate, not a coincidence, was perhaps a commentary on the righteousness of Megabyzus' cause or a reflection of Ousiris' Egyptian connections. Megabyzus' nobility was on display yet again as he personally protected the fallen Ousiris, ensuring that the Persian commander was spared and subsequently returned to Artaxerxes at the King's request. Megabyzus remained consistent. He inflicted the same defeat, in the same way, on the King's agent Ousiris as he did on the King's enemy Inaros.

The second commander who was dispatched, Menostanes, fared no better (F14 §43). Menostanes was the son of Artarios, the satrap of Babylon and a brother of Artaxerxes. Megabyzus won another victory, during which he also defeated Menostanes in single combat, so the legend grows. The account becomes even more telescoped at this juncture. Photius moved directly to Artarios' urging Megabyzus to come to terms with the king. Whether there was any change in fortune for Megabyzus after these two impressive victories is not recorded, but we may discern from the extant storyline that it was important for him to return to the King's

good graces. Megabyzus expressed willingness to come to terms but preferred to stay in Syria rather than appear at court again. At court, both Artoxares the Paphlagonian eunuch (see chapter 1, no. 14) and Amestris urged Artaxerxes to make peace. The King agreed, dispatching Artarios, Amytis, Artoxares, and Petesas the son of Ousiris to Megabyzus. After much cajoling, they apparently persuaded the understandably hesitant Megabyzus to return to Artaxerxes, who pardoned him.

The very next sequence recorded in Photius' epitome (F14 §43), however, refers to renewed tension between Megabyzus and the King. While on a lion hunt, Megabyzus struck and killed a lion that had lunged for Artaxerxes. This was considered a grievous offense, even if, as Ctesias tells it, he was protecting the King. Megabyzus here took on the role of the King, arrogating to himself a critical obligation that was reserved for the King. Artaxerxes was enraged.

In Near Eastern traditions, heroic combat and the hunt were motifs associated in sculpture and inscriptions with kings and heroes (see figs. 16–17). For the Achaemenids, as for their predecessors, the lion hunt was a manifestation of the King's triumph and control over chaos. Depriving him of the opportunity to make the kill—in effect, to perform his function as the maintainer of order—was considered tantamount to rebellion.[59] The fact that Megabyzus had already rebelled made this arrogation of kingship, from Artaxerxes' perspective, all the more threatening.

Artaxerxes ordered Megabyzus' decapitation, but the entreaties of Amytis and others resulted instead in his banishment to Curtae, a place on the Red Sea. This seems an odd locale, but no other details are provided. After five years in exile, Megabyzus returned, was reconciled—yet again through intercession of members of the royal family and the elite—with the King, and admitted to the group of the King's table companions. The manner of his return is notable: he did so disguised as a πισάγας, the Hellenized Persian word for a leper. The disguise was effective, as it allowed Megabyzus to travel undetected; it also represented an inversion of his noble status.[60] Photius' final note about him is that he died at age seventy-six, deeply mourned by Artaxerxes I.

The hero's career spanned two generations in which he was consistently noble as well as effective on the battlefield, following Ctesias' heroic model. He quelled Babylonian and Egyptian revolts, and his own rebellion ended via diplomacy, not by force. His refusal, while on campaign with Xerxes, to pillage Delphi is a not-incidental detail that reveals his character, since he was disobeying an order from the King himself. Here his good character manifested itself in insubordination, for which he was not (at least in the extant record) punished, and which foreshadowed an independent streak befitting one of such standing and accomplishment. The Delphi episode occurs before Amytis' adultery; the explicit contrast with his nobility is a recurring theme. When Megabyzus himself rebelled, his noble and

principled character had already been reinforced several times—not least by Megabyzus' own actions and behavior, but also by the implicit parallels with earlier characters in the work such as Parsondes and Cyrus. His rebellion seems understandable, even justifiable and righteous. Although set in a Greek work for a Greek audience, this story is far removed from the typical emphasis on the centrality of the King projected by Achaemenid ideology and dominating the inscriptional and visual records. On two major monuments we find prominent supporters of the King portrayed in ways representative of their status within Achaemenid ideology (see figs. 1 and 4–5). In the Bisitun inscription Darius' six helpers are mentioned (DB §68); on the relief, two members of the elite stand behind the King bearing his weapons, but the figures are not labeled. Six figures are portrayed on the side walls of King Darius I's tomb relief at Naqsh-i Rustam, but only two figures in the upper left, Gobryas and Aspathines, are labeled (DNc and DNd, respectively).[61]

The Megabyzus saga, even in its abbreviated form, presents a complex hero of great accomplishment and nobility but also a foil to the Achaemenid line. He was, in the main, a loyal supporter of Achaemenid rule, but he represented a continuing potential threat—more than once made manifest—to that rule. His story thus represents not only a heroic family saga but also the ambiguity associated with complex dynastic issues, cast through a Greek literary lens. Perhaps not coincidentally, in consideration of Ctesias' thematic explorations, Megabyzus' characterization is thrown into sharper relief by a consideration of other ambivalent characters within the saga. The women of the royal household represent one example: Amytis was unfaithful but periodically interceded on his behalf; his mother-in-law, Amestris, advocated for him but also contravened his guarantees of safety for Inaros. Amestris had her own motivation, which represents another, important, theme.[62]

Both Artaxerxes and Megabyzus rejected Amestris' initial requests for Inaros, Megabyzus summarily, judging from the text's "he sent her away" (ἀποπέμπεται). But the feminine prevailed. The King was similarly inverted in this instance, either uninvolved or outmaneuvered, but in any case relegated to second stage. He initially rejected Amestris' demands, with the implication that he supported Megabyzus' guarantees, but he was eventually worn down, his authority overturned by the women around him, itself a recurrent motif in Greek accounts of Persian monarchs. Subsequently, in the contexts of Megabyzus' revolt and his exile after killing the lion, these same women (among others) were prominent in interceding on behalf of his return. Never literally feminized as Parsondes was by Nanaros, Megabyzus ultimately retained his heroic stature and, further, ended up reconciled with the Achaemenid line.

Others in his family were not so fortunate, and the saga became a tragedy (F14 §44–45). The now widowed Amytis returned to her wanton ways and became

involved in a spectacular scandal with the Greek physician Apollonides. Ctesias claimed that Apollonides tricked Amytis into having sex with him to forestall a minor ailment, a curious prescription that may simply, among other things, reveal that fierce rivalries existed among doctors as well as historians. Shortly thereafter, Amytis' condition worsened, and she revealed Apollonides' actions to her mother, who wrought a terrible vengeance. After Amytis' death, her and Megabyzus' son Zopyrus defected to Athens (cf. Hdt. 3.160), and he was subsequently killed while with the Athenians on an expedition against Caunus. Ctesias noted that the Caunian responsible was impaled at the command of Amestris, still fanatically devoted to the family honor.

The threat represented by Megabyzus' line as potential rivals for the throne persisted in his and Amytis' other son, Artyphius. A succession crisis followed Artaxerxes I's death. The Achaemenid line through the primary wife was interrupted with the murder of the heir apparent, Xerxes II, son of Artaxerxes I and his queen, Damaspia. Several other children born of his secondary wives and concubines could, through their father, claim Achaemenid descent (F15 §47). Artyphius had such a claim through his mother, and he joined Arsites—another of the Achaemenid claimants, the full brother of Ochus (Darius II)—in revolt. Artyphius apparently did not possess his father's heroic qualities or political skill—or he was simply unlucky. He was defeated and delivered to Darius II. Parysatis, safeguarding the family line on the model of Amestris, counseled Darius to wait until the other rebel, Arsites (Darius' brother, and thus also a threat), was won over. Once Arsites submitted, presumably with the expectation of leniency, both he and Artyphius were killed (F15 §52), an ignoble end to Ochus' challengers and, as we have it, the Megabyzus saga.

Conclusion

The remainder of the *Persica* was set within Ctesias' lifetime. The material is less obviously fictional, but, with few balancing sources, the tangle of history and embellishment becomes harder to unravel. Whether this is a function of Photius' choices or not, his epitome after the Megabyzus saga moves from one conspiracy and rebellion to another until Darius II is secure on the throne. The epitome continues the thread from the time of Artaxerxes I and the various branches of the royal family: offspring of Artaxerxes by women other than Damaspia and relatives by intermarriage with the other noble families. Among these are several sons of Artaxerxes I; both of Megabyzus' sons (see chapter 4); Pissouthnes (and his son Amorges); Artoxares the eunuch (see chapter 1, no. 14); and Teritoukhmes.

It is unclear, based on the surviving text, whether any of these others received from Ctesias the air time or adulation that Megabyzus did.[1] Teritoukhmes, son of Hydarnes, is a possible candidate, judging from what is preserved. Darius II married two of his children by Parysatis—Arsakes (the future Artaxerxes II) and Amestris—to Hydarnes' children Stateira and Teritoukhmes, respectively. This marriage alliance to Hydarnes' family is interpreted in modern works to have secured important support for Darius II's bid for the throne. Hydarnes is believed to have been the descendant of the Hydarnes who was one of the Seven conspirators against the Magus in 522, the crisis that resulted in the accession of Darius I.[2] Once Hydarnes died, Teritoukhmes was appointed satrap in his stead, although Photius did not record which satrapy that was.

The Teritoukhmes affair—abbreviated as it is—focuses on his desire for his own sister Rhoxane (F15 §55–56, Photius). She is described as a great beauty, skilled in archery and the javelin, attributes applied to no other Persian woman in the epitome.[3] She was thus an echo of the warrior queens from earlier in the narrative, such as Semiramis or Zarinaia. Teritoukhmes' desire for his sister led him to despise his wife, Amestris, whom he planned to murder by enclosing her in a sack and stabbing her to death. Word of the plot leaked out, and Darius II sent word to

a certain Oudiastes, promising a reward if Amestris was saved. Oudiastes, with many others, attacked Teritoukhmes, who died fighting valiantly, killing thirty-seven of his attackers—a detail supplied to emphasize his heroic nature, in the mold of Megabyzus, Cyrus, or Parsondes. Parysatis' violent reaction against the remaining members of Teritoukhmes' family may be explained simply as vengeance for the planned murder of her daughter, but it may speak also to the severity of the threat posed by Teritoukhmes' relatives. His mother, his brothers Mitrostes and Helikos, and two sisters were buried alive; Rhoxane was cut to pieces.

The exigencies of Darius II's need for support granted Hydarnes and then Teritoukhmes a great deal of prestige, but once secure, Darius II and Parysatis reverted to an insular focus. In the purge of Teritoukhmes' family, only Stateira was spared, at the tearful request of Arsakes (Artaxerxes II), despite the misgivings expressed by Darius II to Parysatis (F15 §56). Parysatis many years later successfully arranged Stateira's death as well (F27 §70, Photius; F29b, Plutarch). Artaxerxes II's subsequent marriage to his own daughter Atossa would have further reinforced Achaemenid lineage.

Ctesias continued to apply and modify his favorite themes—for example, inversion, excess, feminization—right up to the end of the *Persica*. He meant his readers to draw comparisons between characters. Megabyzus, as his career vacillated between staunch loyalty and outright rebellion, became an in-between character himself: he was not a eunuch, but his travails and personal life served to highlight extremes. Ctesias witnessed, and was fascinated with, the pageantry and ritual associated with Achaemenid ideology, in itself part of a continuum that stretched back for centuries to Assyrian, Babylonian, and Elamite antecedents. Many elements of Persian court life and culture, reiterated throughout this book, were easily cast as feminine and exotic—as Other—and thus inferior, in terms of long-standing Greek stereotypes. These included the ceremonies, costumes, and accoutrements of the king and court; the presence of eunuchs among the palace staff; the reception of visitors, animals, tribute, and tales from foreign lands; as well as the ecstatic rites associated with Ishtar and other deities, such as the Persian Anahita. Some of these elements served as the foundations for the hypermasculine traditions of kingship in this region, a phenomenon that Ctesias could easily manipulate in writing the *Persica* for a Greek audience.

Perhaps Photius may be credited for some artful thematic organization of his epitome, though it seems more likely that he was preserving, in severely telescoped form, themes that are pervasive throughout the *Persica*. As always, the nature of the extant text requires qualification, but in dealing with the historical sagas (i.e., those sections covering the period from the reign of Artaxerxes I onward), Ctesias appears to have focused on the complex interplay between various Persian noble

families and the Achaemenid line. Artaxerxes I's claim to the throne through his lineage was beyond dispute. But the claim of Darius II was dubious, no better than that of several of his rivals, and thus Teritoukhmes may have posed a graver threat to him than Megabyzus did to Artaxerxes I—regardless of the historicity of Teritoukhmes' passion for his own sister and wicked plot to kill his wife, the princess Amestris. Ctesias' track record in the *Persica* is too spotty for us to accept at face value his account of even close-to-contemporary events, even with occasionally credible details. Entertainment and art were the purpose of his work, not an objective record. Why stick with the facts when so much exotic and fascinating inspiration was at hand to embellish?

The selection of legendary elements and literary topoi—Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian—was too rich to ignore. Their influence was pervasive, not just in the *Persica*'s exotic details but in its literary underpinnings. It was not a distillation of Akkadian literature per se but a work of Greek literature bearing a pervasive and indelible Near Eastern imprint. The Near Eastern context was an inspiration as well as a foil against which Ctesias reacted. It seems appropriate to classify the *Persica* as Ctesias' Hellenized rendering of Mesopotamian and Iranian traditions, coupled with his own artful ingenuity: a melodramatic take on the extravagant ruling elite of a world empire, and their forerunners. The various narratives analyzed above were chosen to illustrate Ctesias' commandeering of Near Eastern material into a hybrid work. The *Persica* may be considered something more than a simplistic borrowing or reception of Mesopotamian motifs. It is, rather, an appropriation of them.

There was no place more cosmopolitan in its day than the Persian court, which offered exposure to a wide-ranging cultural diversity, overwhelming and bewildering at times, but encompassing myriad possibilities for inspiration. Ctesias' tendency to confuse court titles and functions suggests that he paid little mind to sorting out the details, or he purposely conflated them. Eunuchs were an inescapable part of the court experience: a readily available resource for Ctesias and a fascinating phenomenon for his audience. In the fourth century (and beyond), this stuff clearly sells. Many of the sagas considered in chapter 4 remind the modern reader of themes manifest in later Iranian epic and the great heroes and heroines of the *Shahnameh*. One need not think of the legends of Parsondes, of Zarinaia and Stryangaios, or of Arbakes and Belesys as made up out of whole cloth; they are, rather, Ctesian renderings of Near Eastern traditions, with a Greek veneer. The Semiramis saga already resonated with a Greek audience, but Ctesias' version cannot be fully appreciated without an understanding of the Sargon legends as its backdrop. His version of Cyrus the Great's story is beholden to the same legends and simultaneously reacts against them. The centuries between Sargon of Akkad

and Artaxerxes II—almost two millennia—witnessed consistent renewal of Mesopotamian traditions. Ctesias was a link in the continuum vis-à-vis their transmission to the Greek world—whence he came and where his work belonged. Especially when we consider his early and pre-Achaemenid material, whether Ctesias was a historian or not should no longer be the point of the debate, but rather his place as an innovator in the genre of romance writing.

Appendix: Regnal Dates of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Kings

Neo-Assyrian Period

Ashur-dan II, 934–912
Adad-nerari II, 912–891
Tukulti-Ninurta II, 891–884
Ashurnasirpal II, 884–859
Shalmaneser III, 859–824
Shamshi-Adad V, 824–811 (husband of Sammu-ramat/Semiramis)
Adad-nerari III, 811–783
Shalmaneser IV, 783–773
Ashur-dan III, 773–755
Ashur-nerari V, 755–745
Tiglath-pileser III, 745–727
Shalmaneser V, 727–722
Sargon II, 722–705
Sennacherib, 705–681
Esarhaddon, 681–669
Ashurbanipal, 669–630
Ashur-etel-ilani, 630–623
Sin-shar-ishkun, 623–612
Ashur-uballit II, 612–609

Neo-Babylonian Period

Nabopolassar, 626–605
Nebuchadnezzar II, 605–562
Amel-Marduk, 562–560
Neriglissar, 560–556
Labashi-Marduk, 556
Nabonidus, 556–539

Achaemenid Persian Period

Cyrus the Great, 559–530
Cambyses, 530–522
Darius I, 522–486
Xerxes I, 486–465
Artaxerxes I, 465–424
Xerxes II, 424–423
Darius II, 423–404
Artaxerxes II, 404–359
Artaxerxes III, 359–338
Artaxerxes IV (Arses), 338–336
Darius III, 336–330

Notes

Introduction

1. See Kollesch 1989 on Cnidus as a center for Greek medicine. East-west cultural interchange crosses a wide area, chronologically as well as spatially, with a large body of scholarship devoted to discrete elements. See in general M. West 1997, chap. 12, and S. West 2013, 80–81, for approaches similar to the one proposed here.

2. The main passages are T3 (Diod. Sic. 2.32.4) and T7a (Photius). Cf. the differing attitudes among the contributions in Wiesehöfer, Rollinger, and Lanfranchi 2011. Note also inter alia Jacoby 1922, 2033–35; Brown 1978; Dorati 1995, 2011; Lenfant 2004, vii–xxvii; Stronk 2010, 6–11.

3. See Lenfant 2014 for Ctesias' dates vis-à-vis other fourth-century writers of *Persica*. Note Flower 2012, 86, for Xenophon's awareness of Ctesias' work.

4. Themes may be universal, of course—thus the occasional reference here to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther folktale index (Uther 2004; hereafter ATU). See Burkert 2005, 296, on "dependencies" (Burkert utilizes the dragon-slayer motif as an example), an approach that has also informed mine.

5. The plot of the Book of Esther would find a good home in Ctesias' *Persica*, but beyond the thematic parallels, any attempt to establish "influence" from one on the other is fraught with methodological difficulties. Many such elements in the Hebrew Bible find antecedents in the Greek tradition, rather than the reverse, but both tap into older Near Eastern traditions, including Assyrian/Babylonian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic ones. Beyond these difficulties remains the intractable problem of dating the biblical material; see inter alia Kuhrt 1995, 422–23; Barbour 2013.

6. The main exception to this is analysis of the story of the Saka queen Zarinaia and Stryangaios as preserved in Nicolaus and other writers, which may be compared to POxy 2330—a comparison that suggests just how much Ctesias' original style and presentation were altered by those writers from whom we know the *Persica*. See chapter 4 in this volume and note Gera 1993, 209; de Jong 2010; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 37; Stronk 2010, 43–47; 2011a, 387–91; de Jong 2014; and the contributions to Whitmarsh and Thomson 2013. For Herodotus the bibliography is enormous; see Baragwanath 2008 and the contributions to Baragwanath and de Bakker 2012.

7. On novelistic elements, see, e.g., Kuch 2003, which traces the origins of the ancient novel to ca. 300 BCE, emphasizing Alexander's conquests as opening up the Orient to the

Greeks; see also Ryholt 2013. Ctesias' *Persica*, though not mentioned, fits perfectly into Kuch's overview of epic space. Cf. Holzberg 2003 for a short excursus on Ctesias as a forerunner, especially of the idealized romance; see also Whitmarsh 2011; Wiesehöfer 2013.

8. Note, e.g., the trenchant remarks of Henkelman (2011b, 124), citing Momigliano (1931) 1998, 79; cf. Bichler 2004a and 2011. See Green 2010, vii–x, on the study of Diodorus.

9. Lenfant 2004, cxxxiii– cxxxvii, with references to earlier literature, serves as a convenient starting point for thematic parallels.

10. Any such "citation" would have invoked the "royal records" or the like, as discussed later.

11. These figures are based on Lenfant 2004, which was in turn based on Jacoby 1958 (*FGrH* 688), and also on Stronk 2010. Citations to Ctesias' text are generally to Lenfant 2004 or Stronk 2010, since those editions contain the Greek text as well as translation.

12. Karttunen 1997; Berktold et al. 2011. Stronk 2010, chaps. 2–3, ably contextualizes these difficult issues. It is not my intention, nor it is even feasible, to rehash the particulars of all these debates here. See Baron 2013, esp. chap. 1, for discussion of the term "cover text," with references.

13. Jacoby 1922, 2040–43; Lenfant 2004, xxvii n79, cxc–cxci; the books are of unequal length but comparable to those in Herodotus or Thucydides.

14. F16 (Photius) indicates that Darius II's illness and death are relayed in Book 19.

15. Briant 2002, chap. 7; Kuhrt 2007, chap. 12; Brosius 2010; Llewellyn-Jones 2013.

16. As just one example, note Ashurbanipal's account of the initial visit of Gyges' messenger, whom, at least initially, no one could understand: Edition A, col. ii, 111–25 (Borger 1996, 31–32). See also Cogan and Tadmor 1977; Fuchs 2010.

17. Cf. inter alia Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 55–59; Stronk 2010, 21–30; Brosius 2011, 74–75. Cf. the remarks of Stolper (2014, 20) on functionally polyglot literacy in the context of the Persepolis Fortification Archive. A parallel may be found in Demetriou 2012, 208–9, on Sidonians at the Peiraeus and bilingualism.

18. See M. West 1997, 606–9; Beaulieu 2007b on the use of Aramaic, esp. 205–10 for the Achaemenid period; Brosius 2011, 74; Whitmarsh 2013, 8–16.

19. Parysatis' mother was Andia, a concubine of Artaxerxes I; note Stolper 2006. See Lion 2011 on gender and literacy; Briant 2002, 725, on Persian-Babylonian connections; Llewellyn-Jones 2013, chap. 4, on women in the royal court.

20. On oral history as a model, note Evans 2013, 117–26; Kim 2013 on the orality of Near Eastern traditions and their transmission; Michalowski 2010b, 7–8, on epic and genre. There are several examples of oral recitation of written works: see, e.g., Oppenheim 1960.

21. Stolper 1985, 96, for Arbareme; 90–91 for Artoxares and Menostanes.

22. The many good reasons for this are well visited in the modern literature. Some of these issues, those relevant to the task at hand, are discussed in this book, but in the main they are not rehashed here. Note Bichler 2004a, 2011 for an extreme view, and cf. Almagor 2012.

23. σχεδὸν ἐν ἅπασιν ἀντικείμενα Ἡροδότῳ ἱστορῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ψεύστην αὐτὸν ἀπελέγχων ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ λογοποιὸν ἀποκαλῶν· καὶ γὰρ νεώτερος μέν ἐστιν αὐτοῦ. φησὶ δὲ αὐτὸν τῶν πλειόνων ἃ ἱστορεῖ αὐτόπτην γενόμενον ἢ παρ' αὐτῶν Περσῶν, ἔνθα τὸ ὁρᾶν μὴ ἐνεχώρει, αὐτήκοον καταστάντα, οὕτω τὴν ἱστορίαν συγγράψαι (T8, Photius).

24. Note Brosius' interesting remarks (2011, 74–75) about Ctesias' placing himself in the role of royal advisor, thus actually playing the part that Demaratus, Democedes, and others play in Herodotus' account.

25. See the contributions in Lanfranchi, Roaf, and Rollinger 2003, reviewed in Waters 2005; see also Tuplin 2004.

26. Note Rollinger 2011, esp. 337–43, on Ctesias' narrative of the rise and fall of the Median Empire, with regard to the work's literary quality in a Greek context.

27. λέγει δὲ καὶ ἑωρακέναι τόδε τὸ ζῷον ἐν Πέρσαις Κτησίας ἐξ Ἰνδῶν κομισθὲν δῶρον τῷ Περσῶν βασιλεῖ, εἰ δή τῳ ἱκανὸς τεκμηριῶσαι ὑπὲρ τῶν τοιούτων Κτησίας· ἀκούσας γε μὴν τὰ ἴδιά τις τοῦδε τοῦ ζῴου, εἶτα μέντοι τῷ συγγραφεῖ τῷ Κνιδίῳ προσεχέτω (F45dβ, Ael. *NA* 4.21). See Nichols 2011, 26, 42nn64–67, on inspirations for the martichora from Near Eastern art.

28. No lengthy search is necessary to find similar assessments: e.g., T13 (Photius), T11a (Strabo), T11d (Plutarch).

29. Comploi 2000, 231 and n91, with references to earlier literature; Madreiter 2012.

30. Lenfant 2009 and 2014.

31. Note the contributions in Wiesehöfer, Rollinger, and Lanfranchi 2011. On the phenomenon of hybridization, cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 356–440; Osborne 2012, 326.

32. Stronk 2010, 36–42; 2011a, 394. Consider as a parallel Plutarch's adaptation of sources in writing his biographies, for which see Beneker 2012, 59, citing inter alia Pelling 1980 and 1990; Marincola 1997.

33. See Holzberg 2003; cf. Bichler 2011, 22–23.

34. The phrase "lies and bizarre tales" comes from Plutarch's μύθων ἀπιθάνων καὶ παραφόρων (T11d).

35. For Iskandar and Dara, see Kuhrt 2007, 456, citing Wood 1997, 120. See Steiner and Nims 1985 as well as Vleeming and Weselius 1985 for the Aramaic text on Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin. On Ahiqar, see Lindenberger 1985; S. West 2003, 423–26; Chyutin 2011; S. West 2011.

36. See Stronk 2010, 2n1 and 201, for a reconstructed proem, based on testimonia.

37. Commentary on this issue is vast. For a sampling with references, see, e.g., Bigwood 1976, 14–16; Melchert 1996, 181–83; Lenfant 2004, xxxvi–xxxix; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 58–65; Stronk 2010, 15–25.

38. Veenhof 1986; Pedersén 1998; Brosius 2003; Briant, Henkelman, and Stolper 2008; Waters 2010b; Stolper 2014.

39. Nabonidus Chronicle iii 18, translated in Kuhrt 2007, 51; see Waerzeggers 2012 for a trenchant overview of the chronicles' composition and uses. For Cyrus, see chapter 3 in this volume.

40. Kent 1953, 132; R. Schmitt 1991, 73–74; Kuhrt 2007, 149.

41. Sachs and Hunger 1988, 1:11–12. On the chronicles (i.e., the written texts) as "scholarly documents" kept within the closed world of the scribal schools, cf. Liverani 1995, 2359; George 2007, 458.

42. Beaulieu 2007a, 478; see also Clancier 2009. Note the comments of Haubold (2013b, 10) on the inaccessibility of Mesopotamian archives to outsiders.

43. Jursa 2007, 77–78.

44. Quoted from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Revised Standard Edition, ed. H. May and B. Metzger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 608. See discussion at Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 62–63; Stronk 2010, 15–23.

45. Grayson 1975, 112–18; Glassner 2004, chap. 9.

46. See Bigwood 1978a with Stronk 2010, 53.

Chapter 1. The Eunuch In-between

1. Hall 1989, 157–58; cf. Lenfant 2013. See Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987, 43–44; Melchert 1996, 120–21, on the fictional quality of Ctesias' eunuchs. Note also Lenfant's germane parallel (2012, 276) of Ctesias' blending of men and animals in the *Indica* with his blurring of gender boundaries in the *Persica*.

2. Modern translations differ in their application of the term "powerful" or "influential" to a given eunuch. There is variation in Photius' Greek, but typically forms of δύναμαι/δυνατός or μέγας are found; adjectives often occur in the superlative. Photius (T8) emphasizes that Ctesias reacted explicitly and negatively to Herodotus' work (see the introduction to this volume), and note also Melchert 1996, 66–67.

3. See Tougher 2010 for an overview; also see the classic study of Guilland (1943); Lenfant 2012, 264–65; and the introduction to this volume.

4. Caria was also known for its eunuchs; see in particular Briant 2002, 273, 919, citing Maass 1921. For Caria during the Achaemenid period, see Sekunda 1991, and for the fourth century, see Hornblower 1982; Ruzicka 1992. One later tradition (Amm. Marc. 14.6.17) indicates that it was Semiramis who instituted eunuchism; see Llewellyn-Jones 2002, 45nn63–64; another attributes the phenomenon to a legendary Atossa (Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 178); see Nagel 1982, 73.

5. See the contributions to Tougher 2002 and note his remarks in the introduction to that volume (pp. vii–xii); see Llewellyn-Jones 2002 for the Achaemenid period. Note also Guyot 1980; G. Taylor 2000; Briant 2002, 268–77, 919–20; Hornblower 2003; Lenfant 2004, cxviii–cxx; 2012; 2013; Kuhrt 2007, 577, with excerpts at 588–91; Davidson 2007, 709–10n 69. Leick 1994, chap. 14, deals with various liminal figures, but with emphasis on homosexuals and prostitutes, and minimal discussion of eunuchs. Most work on eunuchs in antiquity focuses on the later Roman and the Byzantine periods: e.g., Hopkins 1978, chap. 4.

6. Note the remarks of Harris 1991, 265, 270, 276, on Ishtar/Inanna as a liminal figure, which overlap and parallel this assessment of eunuchs.

7. This characterization is purposely brief and admittedly simplistic. For fuller discussion of eunuchs in general, see Bullough 2002; Llewellyn-Jones 2002, 34–35. On sexuality, see inter alia Skinner 2005.

8. E. Schmitt 1953, 225, and pls. 148–50; pl. 121 for the Treasury Relief. As a parallel, note Root's discussion (2013, 56–57) on the liminality manifest in the Apadana reliefs via the gift- (or tribute-) bearers. Some of the Persians and Medes leading the delegations

could, perhaps, have held the various titles and honorifics that Ctesias identified—correctly or not—with the eunuchs in his *Persica*. Arjuna's stint as a eunuch in the *Mahabharata* (a disguise chosen by him at the beginning of book 4) may offer a parallel from the Indo-Iranian tradition, but this possibility is not pursued here; for the episode, see Allen 1999, 407.

9. Note the various contributions in Jacobs and Rollinger 2010.

10. One may wonder whether similar motifs were at play in Herodotus' representation of the Magus Patizeithes, Cambyses' steward or manager of the household (τῶν οἰκίων μελεδωνός, 3.61.1), who masterminded the usurpation and placed his own brother, the false-Smerdis, upon the throne. Herodotus does not label Patizeithes a eunuch, however, and the reference to eunuchs in 3.78 implies that he was not. The theme of eunuchs and access will be discussed further below. Women's quarters may not have been localized in one place. On the harem, see Briant 2002, 277–86; Llewellyn-Jones 2002, 25–33; 2013, chap. 4; and cf. Briant 2013; note also the trenchant remarks of D. Lewis 1977, 21–22.

11. Michalowski 2010b, 9.

12. S.v. "t i r u" in the e-PSD (Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary), accessed 16 March 2012, http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd/nepsd-frame.html. Note the discussion of the term in George 1997.

13. Transliteration (first link) and translation (second link) from the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL), both accessed 16 March 2012, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.1.1.2&display=Crit&charenc=gcirc&lineid=c112.75; http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.2&charenc=j#.

14. Names and bracketed explanation are supplied for clarity. Compare also George 1999, 195, tablet xii, lines 118–19. Transliteration (first link) and translation (second link) via ETCSL, both accessed 16 March 2012, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.1.8.1.4&display=Crit&charenc=gcirc#; http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.8.1.4.

15. Among others, see Oppenheim 1973; Tadmor 1983, 2002; Grayson 1995; Parpola 1995, 391n36; Deller 1999; Dalley 2001b; Siddall 2007; Barjamovic 2011, 57–59; Radner 2011, 359–61; and references in n. 16.

16. Dalley 2001b, 201–2. Briant (2002, 276, citing P. Garelli) finds it difficult to countenance the idea that the term *ša rēši* must always refer to a literal eunuch, since accepting that equation necessitates accepting that a large majority of the Assyrian court was castrated; cf. Davidson 2007, 709–10n6; Barjamovic 2011, 57. Henkelman 2008, 20–27, surveys various court titles (Akkadian and Elamite) from the Neo-Elamite period; see pp. 23–24 for the *ša rēši*.

17. Note also Ambos 2009 and Pirngruber 2011, especially for discussion of evidence from Middle Assyrian law, and Peled 2012; for the relevant texts, see Roth 1997, 195–209. See Henkelman 2003a, 118–23, 162–64, on Achaemenid court titles; and see below for connections with the title *ustarbaru*.

18. Zorzi and Jursa 2011, citing Leichty 1970, 232–33.

19. Cf. Barjamovic 2011, 57–59, with extensive bibliography; Lenfant 2012, 279–81. Note *CAD* R, 292–96 (lemma for *ša rēši*). See Tougher 2010, 85–86, on the portrayal of

eunuchs in Byzantine art and the significance of the beard (or lack thereof); Kuhrt 2007, 579n4, cites an Ottoman parallel.

20. See Barnett 1976 for the North Palace—e.g., pls. xvi–xvii; also Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998 for the Southwest Palace. Note also Reade 1972, 91–92; Henshaw 1980, 293; Marcus 1981; Nadali 2007 for the sculptural evidence.

21. See Russell 1999, 175 (epigraph inscription), 178 (relief), for the installation of Huban-nikaš II; see pp. 173–76 for the relief sequence.

22. Edition B, col. iv, 27–32: (27) ^{LÚ}NIM.MA-*a-a te-bu-us-su it-it* ŠÀ-*bi* (28) *la da-abba-ku la ḫas-sa-ku ṣe-let-su* ^{m}EN.BA-*šá* ^{KUR}*Gam-bu-la-a-a* (29) ^{md}MUATI.MU.KA(*eš*) ^{LÚ}GÚ.EN.NA ARAD^{MEŠ} *da-gíl pa-ni-ia* (30) ^{md}AMAR.UTU.MU.DÙ ^{LÚ}*šu-ut* SAG^{MEŠ} *šá* ^{m}*Ur-ta-ki* (31) *ša it-ti-šu-nu iš-ku-nu pi-i-šu a-na mit-ḫu-ṣi* ^{KUR}EME.GI$_7$ ^{KUR}URI^{KI} (32) *ina pi-ir-ṣa-a-ti id-ku-u*. Other editions have slight variations in orthography; see Borger 1996, 95; Waters 2000, 46, for historical context.

23. See *CAD* Ṭ *ṭātu*, 62–66, for contexts involving gifts and bribes, and the fine line between them. Examples in the Sargonid annals are legion: e.g., Sennacherib inscription 213, lines 6–7 (Grayson and Novotny 2014, 294). Esarhaddon equates the destruction of Babylon by his father (in 689) to the Babylonians' taking their own god Marduk's temple effects and using them as a bribe (*ṭātu*) for Elam's assistance. Additional offenses include abundant examples of "speaking untruthfully" (*idabbuba la šalimtu*), a wonderful antecedent to Darius I's emphasis on the Lie. See Leichty 2011, 229, inscription 113, lines 8–11.

24. Any claim to exhaustiveness would most likely prove illusory, since eunuchs appear across many of the ancient fragments from, or relevant to, the *Persica*, and the evidence is often sporadic. For the etymology of the names discussed here, refer to Tavernier 2007 (Greek index on pp. 705–7) and esp. R. Schmitt 2006 (Greek index on pp. 298–302). Passages, cited by fragment number, may be tracked in any of the recent translations: Lenfant 2004; Nichols 2008; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010; Stronk 2010. Lenfant 2004 and Stronk 2010 also contain the Greek text.

25. See R. Schmitt 2006, 277–79, esp. 278n151 for the form.

26. Mitraphernes is described only as "the most powerful of the eunuchs," but it is not clear to whom he belongs. Lenfant 2004, 391 (index), lists him as Nanaros' eunuch, so she supplies "ses" in the translation (p. 88). The subsequent context suggests to me that Mitraphernes is the king's (Artaios') eunuch.

27. Cf. Xenophon's application of the term (e.g., *Cyr.* 1.3.9), and the potential confusion with εὐνοῦχος; see Briant 2002, 276; Hornblower 2003, 49—especially on the Nehemiah parallel; and also Llewellyn-Jones 2002, 24. In Herodotus, Artembares is a Median noble, whose son the young Cyrus whipped, setting in motion the discovery of Cyrus' true identity (1.114–116; cf. 9.122, Artembares, the ancestor of Artayctes).

28. Tzetzes uses the term "first eunuch" (πρωτοεύνουχον) for Petesakas.

29. Briant (2002, 268) sees the Persian force as led by Bagapates; cf. Lenfant 2004, 117n465; 2012, 279. The issue is the translation of οὗτος here, which, based on context, most assume to refer to Cambyses (see also Stronk 2010, 323). See Briant 2002, 271–72, on the parallels to Ahiqar story; also S. West 2011, 348.

30. See Melchert 1996, 124 and n256, for Plato's version (*Laws* 694c–695c) of the overthrow of death of Cambyses by the Magus, a eunuch.

31. This is presumably the same Artasyras, ruler of the Hyrcanians, who was the first to submit to Cyrus after the latter's defeat of Astyages: F8d* §46, Nicolaus.

32. Guyot 1980, 215–16; Lenfant 2004, 126 (critical apparatus) and 265n528; R. Schmitt 2006, 255–57.

33. See R. Schmitt 2006, 135–36, on the form of the name. Diodorus names Aspamitres "Mithradates," titles him the King's chamberlain (κατακοιμιστής), and indicates that he had the King's fullest trust. Diodorus also notes that Mithradates was both a relative (συγγενής) and a friend of Artabanus; see discussion at Briant 2002, 274. Mithradates secured access to the King's chambers so that Artabanus could kill him (cf. Bagapates' role with the Seven conspirators).

34. Aelian's story about Xerxes' visit to the tomb of Belos (Bel)—i.e., the temple of Marduk—is also believed to be based upon Ctesias (F13b). Aelian indicates that Xerxes was killed by his own son. Babylonian sources corroborate Xerxes' assassination by his son, but the son's name is not given; see Kuhrt 2007, 306–7, for the tablet and Henkelman 2011b on Xerxes and the "tomb of Bel."

35. For the epithet "Paphlagonian" here, compare D. Lewis 1977, 21, and R. Schmitt 2006, 143, for very different explanations, and note Tougher 2002, 153n30, for Chariton's eunuch Artaxates (in *Callirhoe*) as inspired by Artoxares. This episode is further discussed below in this chapter and revisited, in conjunction with the Megabyzus saga as a whole, in chapter 4. Artoxares (Artaḫšaru) is linked with Menostanes in the Babylonian Murashu archive; see the Stolper and Kuhrt references in the following note.

36. Bagorazos and Menostanes are not explicitly identified as eunuchs in F15 §48, though Photius' summary comment seems to imply that they were—as would a literary parallel with Bagorazos' conveyance of the royals for interment in Persis, an act also attributed to Petesakas, Izabates, and (by extension) Bagapates, as noted above. Bagorazos is accepted as a eunuch by most commentators (though only provisionally so here), but not Menostanes. Cf. Lenfant 2004, 388 (index), where Bagorazos is labeled "subalterne." Bagorazos is listed in Guyot's 1980 register of eunuchs (p. 191); Menostanes is not listed. Cf. Kuhrt 2007, 332n2. Menostanes is identified at §41 as the son of Artarios. Menostanes was appointed *azarbarites* ("chiliarch") by Sogdianus (F15 §49) when the latter claimed the kingship. Both Artarios (Artareme) and Menostanes (Manuštanu) are mentioned in Babylonian documents of the Murashu archive: Stolper 1985, 91–92; Briant 2002, 588–91; Kuhrt 2007, 325–26, 332–33, 577 (on *azarbarites*).

37. The name "Sogdianus" is adopted from other sources (e.g., Diod. Sic. 2.71.1) as the preferred form instead of Ctesias' "Sekyndianos"; see R. Schmitt 2006, 272–76; Kuhrt 2007, 331n6.

38. Satibarzanes is not labeled a eunuch in either Photius excerpt. He is called a eunuch in Plut. *Art.* 12.4, where he is described as providing water to the wounded Artaxerxes II on the battlefield of Cunaxa.

39. Artasyras, the "King's Eye," discovered Parsikas with Cyrus' body and bade Parsikas

to guard the corpse. This is another manifestation of the motif of the eunuch "accompanying" the dead royal body, on which see below.

40. On the name forms: R. Schmitt 2006, 156–57, 163–66. Note Llewellyn-Jones 2002, 40, with reference to Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993, 32, on the parallel to this story (the motif of the dice throw) in Indian epic tradition; see also Allen 1999, 407.

41. The association with luxury and decadence is, of course, a dominant theme for eunuchs in ancient literature. It is not consistently emphasized but, rather, usually implied by Ctesias or at least by those who transmitted the *Persica*. When it is explicitly mentioned, the motif is always closely associated with feminization, also applicable to eunuchs.

42. Sardanapalus is cut from the same mold as Ninyas, though Sardanapalus' effeminacy is more heavily emphasized: note especially the discussion of this quality in Lanfranchi 2011, 210–19 (and see chap. 4 in this volume), with several parallels to the Ishtar cult and special emphasis on the Sargonid kings' devotion to Ishtar ca. 720–630; see also Teppo 2008; Fink 2014.

43. For comparisons between F8c*, F8b (POxy 2330), and other related fragments, see inter alia Lenfant 2000, 303–4; Stronk 2011a, 387–90. Many other short fragments refer to this story, but only Nicolaus (in the longest extant fragment) preserves the eunuch's prominent role as a confidant.

44. F21 (Xen. *Anab*. 1.8.27) describes the dead Cyrus with eight of his noblest supporters lying dead nearby (literally "on top of him": ὀκτὼ οἱ ἄριστοι τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἔκειντο ἐπ' αὐτῷ), but does not explicitly mention eunuchs.

45. The labels "powerful" and "influential" tend to be applied arbitrarily; see n. 2 above.

46. The implication is that the eunuchs, because of their access, would have known the truth of the matter.

47. Photius' telescoped summary (F15 §48–49) leaves much to be desired. Sometime after conveying the bodies of Artaxerxes I, Damaspia, and Xerxes II to Persis, Bagorazos returned to Sogdianus, who killed him, on a pretext, because of some long-standing enmity. No details are provided. Briant (2002, 590) shrewdly suggests that Bagorazos was killed because he had questioned Sogdianus' legitimacy.

48. For this group—also listed under "The Eunuch between Life and Death"—see below.

49. Other elements factor in as well, of course—e.g., the necessary divine omens (in this case dreams)—but these are in the main left aside from the present discussion.

50. And not only within the *Persica*, of course. This stereotype had great play in the subsequent literature, especially the figure of the eunuch Bagoas in various accounts of the transition from Artaxerxes III to Darius III. See Briant 2003, 426–39, 587–88.

51. See Waters 2011b, 492; and chapter 3 in this volume.

52. The number seven, measuring Bagapates' tenure at Darius' tomb, the number of conspirators, the years Parsondes spent in captivity as a woman, etc., indicates "a long time"; it need not be taken literally, but its choice may be considered instructive. Note the remarks of Briant 2002, 899, on the number seven in conspiracies.

53. Ἀρτοξάρης ὁ εὐνοῦχος, ὃς μέγα ἠδύνατο παρὰ βασιλεῖ, ἐπιβουλεύει βασιλέα θέλων αὐτὸς βασιλεῦσαι· πώγωνα γὰρ καὶ ὑπόρρινα προσέταξεν αὐτῷ γυναικὶ κατασκευάσαι, ἵνα ὡς ἀνὴρ φαίνοιτο, δι' ἧς καὶ καταμηνύεται· καὶ συλλαμβάνεται, καὶ παραδίδοται Παρυσάτιδι, καὶ ἀναιρεῖται.

54. See above, and note Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 57–60, on false beards and cosmetics in Near Eastern tradition.

55. Some commentators translate αὐτῷ γυναικὶ as "his wife" (e.g., Guyot 1980, 186; Kuhrt 2007, 588n2; Stronk 2010, 352). I translate here as "a woman" (with something like "of his household" understood); cf. also Lenfant 2004, 139: "une femme" (similarly, Nichols 2008, 99; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 195; Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 60). Note Lenfant's critical apparatus for variations and emendations (Jacoby 1958, 471: <τῆι> αὐτοῦ γυναικὶ?). The truncated nature of the epitome means that key details that would help us understand the passage are not preserved. Note by way of comparison Hall 1989, 43, on the ambiguity of the word in Greek epic. See Briant 2002, 274, for commentary on this bizarre episode. The forlorn epitaph of woman named Hyle (*IG* XIV 2566) from Bonn, of the second or third century CE, refers to a certain Aisos who married her (the process abetted by a love potion) without divulging the fact that he was a eunuch; I thank Angelos Chaniotis for the reference.

56. For references and historical background, see inter alia MacGinnis 1988; Frame 1992, 153–55; Kuhrt 1995, 588; Bichler 2004b, 501 with n. 10. For the motif of the Assyrian kings cloistered with their concubines and eunuchs, note that Athenaeus uses similar phraseology to describe Ninyas (F1n).

57. Note the letter from Mar-Issar to Esarhaddon on the burial of a substitute king: Parpola 1993, no. 352 (ABL 437).

58. See *CAD* N/I, s.v. *nâlu*, mng. 4, for various references. For the hunting and capture of Nabu-bel-shumati, see Waters 2000, 77–79, and 2002, with references.

59. MacGinnis 1987; see ibid. for further detail and references to similar royal graves found at Ashur and Nimrud. The spectacular discovery of Assyrian queens' tombs is also noteworthy in this context, even if there is no direct link to Ctesias and his eunuchs; see, e.g., the various contributions in Curtis et al. 2008. Note also Kuhrt 1995, 525–26 (Assyrian royal funeral); Wiseman 1985, 112–15 (burial of Nebuchadnezzar II). See Henkelman 2011b for Xerxes and the "tomb of Bel" in Babylon.

60. Cf. Henkelman 2003a, 118–20, 155–56, for these issues of royal title and Ctesias' account of eunuchs, with a different focus, and see pp. 162–64 for a number of references connecting *ustarbaru* with royal individuals. See also Tuplin 2008, 322. Note Jursa 2011, 168–71, for the substitution of *ustarbaru* for *ša rēši* after Xerxes' reign. Tavernier 2014 gives a thorough treatment of the attestations of *ustarbaru* in Babylonian texts of the Achaemenid period; note esp. p. 311 for the *ustarbaru* of Parysatis. At the risk of speculative overreach, one might suggest that particular *ustarbaru* as a good candidate for one of Ctesias' main (oral) sources.

61. See Henkelman 2003a, esp. 107–8, for the text, transliteration, and translation of NN 1848.

62. Elamite after Henkelman 2003a, 117; Old Persian after R. Schmitt 2000b, 46 (and see pl. 22b). See Borger 1972, 389, for the Babylonian version and suggested reconstruction.

63. See Garrison 1998 for treatment of the seals, with references.

64. See Waters 2010b for Cyrus' links to the Medes; 2011b on the Oibaras saga, discussed in chapter 3 in this volume.

65. Hornblower 2003, 45–46, with nn. 19, 21.

66. See, among many possible examples, the treatment in Morford, Lenardon, and Sham 2011, 294.

Chapter 2. Semiramis, Queen of Battle

1. Ctesias Fragments 1a–m, various authors but mainly Diod. Sic. 2.4–20. On Diodorus' use of Ctesias for the Semiramis story, note Stronk 2010, 64–70; Bichler 2014 (with references), and see p. 56 for parallels with Hellanicus' Atossa. On Diodorus in general, note Sacks 1994; Comploi 2000; and the remarks of Green 2010, vii–x. See Sulimani 2005 for identification of geographic locales in the Semiramis legend (also Borzsak 1976). The bibliography on Semiramis is enormous; in addition to works cited below, note Lehmann-Haupt (1914) 1977; Eilers 1971; Nagel 1982; Pettinato 1985; Eck 2003, xxvii–xxx; Lenfant 2004, xliv–xlv, li–liv; Rollinger 2010b; Truschnegg 2011. This treatment does not engage the later Ninus Romance, for which see Anderson 2009 with references.

2. See especially the discussion in Comploi 2000, 224–25, 235–36, on Diodorus' ideal of a good ruler in relation to the tradition of Semiramis' killing of her lovers (see below). Such salacious elements were likely more prominent in the original *Persica*.

3. E.g., the inscriptions DPh §2, DPe §2, DSe §3, DNa §3, and also Hdt. 3.94. We have no details on the magnitude or duration of Darius' Indian expedition. What is to us a campaign measured in a footnote's worth of references may have rivaled, or even surpassed, Xerxes' expedition to Greece. See Haubold 2013a, 107–8, on Berossus' corrective of the Ctesian Semiramis tradition.

4. See inter alia Gera 1997, 65–83; Dalley 2005; Lanfranchi 2011, 206–8, on connections to the historical Sammu-ramat. The name "Semiramis" is etymologized from the Syrian for "doves" (Diod. Sic. 2.4.6); for the derivation from "Sammu-ramat," see Novotny 2002. See Asher-Greve 2007 for Semiramis' reception in later periods. Note Dalley 2013, 121, on the link between the name "Simmas" and Akkadian *simmatu* "dove" (*CAD* S, s.v. *summatu*), see also n. 11 below.

5. The stele was found during the German excavations at Ashur and originally published by W. Andrae in 1913. Transliteration from Grayson 1996, 226; my translation follows Grayson but is slightly modified.

6. Translation after Grayson 1996, 205, excerpted from lines 7–15. On the translation "Lady of the Palace" and related problems understanding MÍ (or MUNUS) É.GAL, see Dalley 2005, 14.

7. Sargon of Akkad is sometimes confused with his Neo-Assyrian namesake, Sargon II (r. 722–705). In the specialist literature, "Sargonic" refers to Sargon of Akkad's dynasty

(ca. 2340–2159), while "Sargonid" refers to Sargon II and his successors (the Neo-Assyrian period). Another Assyrian King Sargon, labeled Sargon I, is attested only from seal impressions on clay tablets and envelopes from Kültepe: see Grayson 1987, 45–46; Michel 2009; and note Fuchs 2011b. Unless explicitly differentiated, references to Sargon herein are to be understood as meaning Sargon of Akkad.

8. Westenholz 2009, 42–43.

9. Note Lightfoot 2002, 71, for parallels with the Syrian goddess Atargatis and her association with fish. The prominence of eunuchs in Atargatis' cult may offer parallels for Ctesias' thematic employment of eunuchs in his work.

10. This episode recalls Aelian's rendition in *On the Nature of Animals* of stories about Gilgamesh and Achaemenes, saved by eagles (*NA* 12.21; see Kuhrt 2007, 176–77, for translation and notes). Analogues abound: e.g., the story of Zal in the *Shahnameh* (Davis 2006, 64).

11. "Standing before" the king brings to mind the function of a eunuch, though there is no indication that Ctesias identified Simmas as such. The word choice here is curious. Another manuscript has προεστῶτι for προεστηκότι; see Eck 2003, 10; Lenfant 2004, 27, 236n120; and n. 4 above. Simmas is described in F1c simply as ὑπηρέτης, a servant or attendant of Ninos.

12. Diod. Sic. 2.5.2: τῆς δὲ Σεμιράμιδος ἐχούσης καὶ τἆλλα ἀκόλουθα τῇ περὶ τὴν ὄψιν εὐπρεπείᾳ.

13. E.g., Liverani 1995, 2360: "Provided that the problem of legitimation has been solved, the celebration of the normal, day-to-day activity of government mainly concerns two sectors: buildings and wars. The successful Mesopotamian king is portrayed as a relentless builder and a victorious warrior."

14. Note Jacobs 2011 for Ctesias' account of Babylon. On the three statues, see Lenfant 2004, 241n187, citing Boncquet 1987, 91n381. The motif of the king restoring temples pervades Assyrian and Babylonian traditions.

15. Bagistanus stems from an Old Persian word **bagastāna*, "place of the gods," demarcating its clear associations with the divine. For Ctesias' attribution of Darius' Bisitun Inscription to Semiramis, see Philips 1968, esp. 165–66. There were a variety of other sculptures ninety to one hundred feet below Darius' relief; many now severely damaged were no doubt in good condition in Ctesias' day. That Ctesias attributed one or more of these to Semiramis is plausible and may restore some (limited) credibility to his account. Philips also postulates Ctesias' experience with other pre-Achaemenid rock reliefs throughout Khuzistan and Fārs. Centuries of Elamite and Iranian precursors gave Ctesias ample opportunities for inspiration as well as conflation.

16. The luxury motif is stereotypically applied to her successors, but it is not a recurrent theme for Semiramis in Ctesias' (surviving) account; whether this is a function of Diodorus' editing is unclear. See above and note Comploi 2000, 229–30; Bichler 2004b, 508–9n37; Truschnegg 2011, 432–39.

17. Diod. Sic. 2.14.1: πανταχοῦ δὲ τὰ μὲν ὄρη καὶ τὰς ἀπορρῶγας πέτρας διακόπτουσα κατασκεύασεν ὁδοὺς πολυτελεῖς, ἐν δὲ τοῖς πεδίοις ἐποίει χώματα, ποτὲ μὲν τάφους

κατασκευάζουσα τοῖς τελευτῶσι τῶν ἡγεμόνων, ποτὲ δὲ πόλεις ἐν τοῖς ἀναστήμασι κατοικίζουσα. Diodorus also relays a report about a lake in Ethiopia whose water acted as a sort of truth serum (2.14.4), adding skeptically that "one may not easily agree with those who say such things" (τοῖς μὲν οὖν ταῦτα λέγουσιν οὐκ ἄν τις ῥᾳδίως συγκατάθοιτο).

18. Semiramis' Indian campaign recalls that of Cyrus the Great against the Derbices, an Indian people who also employed elephants. Cyrus, like Semiramis, was wounded, but he (aided by the Saka and their king Amorges) in the end won a great victory. Unlike Semiramis, however, he died from his wound (see chapter 3).

19. See inter alia B. Lewis 1980, esp. 2–3, for the textual tradition of the birth legend; note also Kuhrt 1995, 44–50, and 2003, 349–50, as well as Westenholz 1997, 2009. See Cooper and Heimpel 1983 for the *Sumerian Sargon Legend* and Alster 1995, 2319–24, for narrative technique in Sumerian epic compositions. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Sargon legends are from Westenholz 1997. Sargon's reputation was not without blemish, as a curious chronicle text dated to the Late Babylonian period implies, though some of its content seems anachronistic: Sargon's attempt to create a replica of Babylon brought Marduk's wrath upon him (lines 18–23). For the text, see Grayson 1975, 45–49, 152–55; Glassner 2004, 268–71.

20. See, e.g., Frayne 1993, 10–12: Inscription E2.1.1.1, on military victories and building projects.

21. For text and translation see Westenholz 1997, 36–49. The *Sumerian Sargon Legend* identifies his father as La'ibum, otherwise unknown. On Sargon's parentage, see B. Lewis 1980, 41–44.

22. Akkadian *dālû* may also be translated "gardener": *CAD* D, 57; B. Lewis 1980, 81n132. The *Sumerian King List* identifies Sargon's father as a gardener, lines 266–267. Text via ETCSL, accessed 18 April 2012, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.2.1*#. The gardener motif implies fertility, a connection to Ishtar's consort Dumuzi. Compare also F10β, the story of Beletaras the gardener as relayed by Agathius (by way of Ctesias?). Beletaras usurped the throne from one Belous (= Bel), son of Derketades (clearly a variation of Derketo). The attribution of the fragment to Ctesias is disputed: see Stronk 2010, 163; Henkelman 2011b, 120–21n30.

23. The title "King of Kish" came to imply the mastery of Sumer and subsequently served as the basis for the title "King of the World"; cf. Hallo 1957, 123, 151; Frayne 1993, 7; Westenholz 1997, 114; 2009, 40.

24. E.g., Cyrus specifically mentions Ashurbanipal in the Cyrus Cylinder, line 43; see Finkel 2013, 7, 133.

25. See B. Lewis 1980, chap. 5, for a catalogue of examples from several traditions; Semiramis is on pp. 160–61; note also Pettinato 1985, 56–57; Henkelman 2006, sec. 4; and, for parallels in the Greek tradition, Moreau 2006. Other iterations of the hero exposed at birth include Moses, Cyrus the Great, Perseus, Oedipus, and Romulus and Remus. Classic overviews of the type include A. Taylor 1964; Dégh 1965; Krzyzanowski 1967.

26. See Dalley 2005, 18, on the parallels between the Mesopotamian sage (*apkallu*) Adapa and Greek Oannes, both wearing fish cloaks; see also Reiner 1961.

27. For discussion of *melammu* and a comparative perspective, see Aster 2012, 12–21, and chap. 2, with references. For the Persian equivalent *xvarnah*, see Battesti 2011.

28. See Van Berg 1978, 34–35, for parallels in Greek literature.

29. πρὸς τὰς ἐν τῷ πράττειν ὅ βούλοιτο χρείας (Diod. Sic. 2.6.6). The tradition relates that the garment was so useful that the Medes and Persians adopted it later (cf. Hdt. 1.135). Note also Justin *Epit*.1.2, where Semiramis is described as disguising herself as Ninos' son and wearing long garments so that no one would know she was a woman.

30. See listings for the disguise motif at ATU III, 171. Later in the *Persica* (F14 §43, Photius), Megabyzus returns from exile, before his pardon, disguised as a *pisagas*, a term that Ctesias apparently equated with a leper. The disguise was so effective, a manifestation of Megabyzus' cleverness (see chapter 4), that his wife Amytis barely recognized him.

31. See Foster 2005a, 931–36, for a translation; and see discussion in Gurney 1972; Waters 2011b, 496. Cleverness (intelligence) and disguise are recurrent themes. For example, Semiramis' clever ploy with the "dummy elephants" on the Indian campaign is echoed by Oibaras' use of dummies in the taking of Sardis; see also n. 30 above for Megabyzus' disguise. The emphasis on intelligence also brings to mind the link with Naqia, the wife of Sennacherib and mother of Esarhaddon, who may have served as one of the models for the legendary Semiramis; see Bigwood 1964, 130; Lenfant 2004, xlv; Dalley 2005, 18; Frahm 2014, 191–92.

32. See *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, lines 470–475 for the garment ($_{tug_2}$) of no known color. On this passage and its context, note Vanstiphout 1995, 12–13, with emphasis on technology and its intelligent application, independent of any translation issues; 2003, 83.

33. Dalley 2005, 16–17, offers a convenient list and references; see Diod. Sic. 2.8.6 for the lion hunt relief.

34. Seux 1967, 305–8.

35. Inter alia see Tadmor 1999; Bedford 2009, 48–49; Wiesehöfer 2009, 87–89; Waters, forthcoming.

36. See Stronk 2010, 155–56, regarding attribution of the Armenian campaign. In the Greek historiographic tradition, settings in distant regions allowed Ctesias to feature even more exotic places (e.g., Bactria, India) than Herodotus, with whom Ctesias clearly saw himself and his work as in competition (see the introduction to this volume).

37. The literature on these phenomena is vast. For a thorough treatment of Sennacherib's palace, see Russell 1991. For the Achaemenid *paradeisoi* (sg. *paradeisos*, from Elamite *partetaš*), note esp. Stronach 1990; Tuplin 1996, 80–131; Bremmer 2002, app. 2; Briant 2002, 442–44; Boucharlat 2009, 2011. The Assyrian precursors of these gardens, the *kirimāḫu* ("botanical garden") of the Sargonid period, were replete with flora from various parts of the empire: Horowitz 1988, 165; 1998, chap. 4; see also Grayson 1974 on the *Sargon Geography*.

38. Note Westenholz 1997, 102. Cf. the emphasis on trading posts and commerce in Diod. Sic. 2.11.1, in a passage whose origins from Ctesias are doubted; see Stronk's discussion, 2010, 155–56.

39. Note Westenholz 1997, 119–20, on line 28 for the translation of this phrase and its difficulties; see also B. Lewis 1980, 62–63.

40. See George 1999, 2; Liverani 2012, 182, on the long history of the "difficult road" motif in Assyrian annals, often including inaccessible mountains; see also Tadmor 1999, 56; Rollinger 2012, 731–32.

41. See, e.g., Michalowski 2010a, 153 and passim; 2010b, 15. Examples are legion. For an Achaemenid example from the Greek tradition, note Plutarch's portrayal of Artaxerxes II leading his troops through the mountains (*Art.* 24–25); for a correlation with the Neo-Assyrian annals, see Kuhrt 2007, 547n6. Note also comparisons between the campaigns of Sargon II and the epic of Gilgamesh: Van de Mieroop 1999, 2010; Foster 2005b, 63–64.

42. See inter alia Kuhrt 1995, 50–52.

43. *Naram-Sin and the Lord of Apišal* (obv. col. i, 3′); Westenholz 1997, and see p. 174 on the location of Apishal, presumably somewhere in northwestern Syria.

44. For Naram-Sin, tragedy is most manifest in the *Curse of Akkad*; see Westenholz 2009, 28–29. Xerxes serves as a well-known example of the tragic monarch; see, e.g., Bridges 2015.

45. For example, Croesus' crossing of the Halys against Cyrus (1.75), and Cyrus' crossing (urged, not coincidentally, by Croesus) of the Araxes River against Tomyris and the Massagetae (1.207–209). Both battles resulted in the defeat of the transgressor, as was the case with Semiramis.

46. Harris 1991 has copious references and several examples from primary sources. For the Sargonid kings' special devotion to Ishtar, see Bahrani 2001, chap. 7; Lanfranchi 2011, esp. 210–13; see also Heffron 2013.

47. See George 2003, 1:472–74, for discussion (including variations in the myths); see 619–23 for transliteration and translation of the Gilgamesh passage. Note inter alia B. Lewis 1980, 58–59; Harris 1991, 272. Ishtar did slay a servant girl for sleeping with Dumuzi; see Jacobsen 1987, 24–27. I thank Paul Delnero for relevant references. Ishtar's relationship with the gardener Šukalletuda brings to mind Sargon the gardener (see above), though the circumstances, and Šukalletuda's fate, are very different.

48. Westenholz 2009, 44, citing Leichty 1970, 82, for the omen.

Chapter 3. A Different Kind of Education for Cyrus

1. Toher 1989, citing Brunt's (1980) seminal work, has remarked on the futility of reconstructing a lost historian's account from fragments of other authors. Compare Drews 1973, 101–4, and esp. Stronk 2010, 78–79, on Nicolaus' thematic concerns, primarily philosophical ones, within a "dramatized" history; see Stronk 2010, 171–73, on prior attempts at untangling this problem.

2. Cyrus the Great's ignoble origins have been understood by some as a subtle commentary on Cyrus the Younger, in the context of his bid for the throne in 401, but this seems a stretch. Nichols (2008, 159), rightly in my view, rejects the idea (cf. Lenfant 2004, lix–lx, inter alia); see also Briant 2002, 14–16.

3. The literature on Cyrus' lineage, the significance of Anshan in his royal titles, and the Achaemenid line is enormous. Cf. Potts 2005, 2011; Carter 2007; Henkelman 2011a; Waters 2011c; Stronach 2013; Zournatzi, forthcoming; all give references to earlier literature.

4. Liverani 2003 offers a compelling testament to the ramifications of this phenomenon.

5. Amytis is described as Cambyses' mother in F13 §12–13 (Photius); thus, as an offshoot of this tradition, Cambyses was a legitimate Median heir.

6. Note Garrison 2011 on PFS 93*; see Henkelman 2011a; Waters 2011c, on the historical context, with copious references to a wide-ranging literature on the topic.

7. Note inter alia comments by Brosius (2011, 75) and Dusinberre (2013, 245–46). There is no obvious analogue in Near Eastern sources for the sequence of offices that Ctesias ascribed to Cyrus. The precise meaning of key socioeconomic class terms (e.g., *awīlum*, *muškēnum*, *wardum*), as well as the degree of freedom that each held vis-à-vis each other and the state, remains a matter of debate. The situation was complex and not static over time throughout the ancient Near East and is thus not fully understood; see Von Dassow 2012 for an overview, esp. p. 216 on the classes of occupational specialists.

8. Henkelman 2003b, 196n48. On Achaemenid throne names, see R. Schmitt 1982, 83–95; Waters 2014, 171.

9. The following is only a sample: R. Schmitt 2000a with qualification; Kellens 2002, 422; Tavernier 2007, 528–30; Henkelman 2011a, 585n25.

10. Mardians have been identified as dwelling in western Fars, but there are a number of alternative theories; see Potts 2005, 23; cf. the Mardians of Arrian, *Anab*. 4.6.6, etc.

11. When Cyrus met his main helper (F8d* §13), Oibaras, the latter's circumstances were similar to Cyrus' at this stage. Both had been beaten by Median overlords, perhaps a motif in Persian origin stories involving Median domination.

12. Note the two Artembares in Herodotus: a Median nobleman (1.114–116) and the ancestor of the crucified Artayctes (9.122); the latter proposed to Cyrus that the Persians move their homeland. Cf. Ahiqar's introduction of his nephew Nadin to Esarhaddon. Nadin's succession to Ahiqar's position was gained not through a series of menial jobs but through his skill as a scribe and his wise counsel (Lindenberger 1985, 484–85).

13. Justin, *Epit*. 1.4.10 echoes Herodotus' version but has Cyrus suckled by a female dog (see Briant 2002, 14–16); compare the doves who fed Semiramis in Ctesias (see chapter 2). Note Luraghi 2013, 104–5, on the Herodotean version and the "son of the king and of the smith" motif (ATU 920). For parallels with the Ardashir story, see Bigwood 1964, 117–29, with references; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 64–65. Kai Khosrow was also raised by a shepherd: see Davis 2006, 275–78.

14. Kuhrt 2003, esp. 355–56, and note her discussion of Nabonidus' interest in the Sargon story, likely a contributing factor in its adaptation to the Cyrus legends. This manifested among other ways in Cyrus' restoration work in Agade, Sargon's city, and Cyrus' continued care for a statue of Sargon found at Sippar and carefully restored by Nabonidus.

15. See Rollinger 2011, esp. pp. 339–40 on τύχη and μοῖρα.

16. See the discussion on Aspathines in chapter 1, with figure 5.

17. Amytis is described elsewhere as having a brother, Parmises, who had three sons (F9 §3). Beyond Photius' brief mention that they were prisoners of the Saka, released in

exchange for the Saka king Amorges, who had been captured by Cyrus, Parmises does not factor into the extant story or the succession. In Herodotus, Astyages' daughter is Mandane, who became Cyrus' mother.

18. Berossus preserves a tradition of Amytis, daughter of Cyaxeres, who was married to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II, but that tradition is even more chronologically suspect (F8b): see Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996, 56–57; and note Brosius 1996, 43–46.

19. After Schaudig 2001, 417, col. i, 24–29: (24) ^{d}AMAR.UTU-*ma i-ta-ma-a it-ti-ya* ^{LÚ}ÉRIN-*man-da šá taq-bu-ú* (25) *ša-a-šu* KUR-*šu ù* LUGAL^{meš} *a-lik i-di-šu ul i-ba-áš-ši* (26) *i-na ša-lu-ul-ti* MU.AN.NA *i-na ka-šá-du* (27) *ú-šat-bu-niš-šum-ma* ^{m}*Ku-ra-áš* LUGAL ^{KUR}*An-za-an* ÌR-*su ṣa-aḫ-ri* (28) *i-na um-ma-ni-šu i-ṣu-tu* ^{LÚ}ÉRIN-*man-da rap-šá-a-ti ú-sap-pi-iḫ* (29) ^{m}*Iš-tu-me-gu* LUGAL ^{LÚ}ÉRIN-*man-da iṣ-bat-ma ka-mu-ut-su a-na* KUR-*šu il-qí*.

20. The bibliography here is enormous as well. Cf. inter alia Beaulieu 1989, 108–10; Dandamaev 1989, 18n7; Rollinger 1999, 128–32; 2003, 297–98, 301–5; Briant 2002, 31–32; Kuhrt 2007, 56–57n10; Waters 2014, 38–39; Waters, forthcoming.

21. For the Naram-Sin Cuthean Legend, see Westenholz 1997, chap. 10.

22. See Adali 2011 on the *umman-manda*.

23. Lanfranchi, Roaf, and Rollinger 2003. Note also Tuplin 2004; Waters 2005, 2010b, 2011a.

24. Pelling 1996 treats the motif and its ambiguity in detail, with several parallels.

25. There are numerous instances comparing kings and the destructive power of the deluge; e.g., for Esarhaddon, see Leichty 2011, 184, rev. 12. See *CAD* Š/III, s.v. *šīnātu* ("urine"), 40–42; *CAD* A/I, s.v. *abūbu* ("devastating flood"), 77–78, for additional references.

26. See R. Schmitt 2006, 115, on the etymology of the name and compare A. Panaino's analysis (2009) of these signs.

27. See for further discussion and references Waters 2011b, on which this section of the chapter is based.

28. Gresseth 1975, 15, cites several examples of the hero-with-helper motif.

29. The reader of the *Persica* was meant to connect Cyrus to his forerunner Parsondes (see chapter 4), who became king of the Cadusians and established lasting enmity with the Medes.

30. Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 8.2.7–8; see discussion in Briant 2002, 304–7, for numerous other examples. The link between horses and Persian identity has long been noted as a feature of Achaemenid royal inscriptions (e.g., DPd § 2, describing Persia as a land of good horses and good men); see inter alia Root 2010, 199, for discussion.

31. One common element in both the Arbakes-Belesys and Cyrus-Oibaras dialogues, as preserved by Nicolaus, is the unworthiness of the current ruler: Sardanapalus or Astyages, respectively. See Parmentier and Barone 2011, xxxviii–xlviii, for Nicolaus' method in his *Histories*.

32. Inter alia: Sumerian dispute poems (Reinink and Vanstiphout 1991); the *Dialogue of Pessimism* (Foster 2005a, 923–26); *Sargon the Conquering Hero* and *Sargon in Foreign*

Lands (Westenholz 1997, 61–63 and 84–93); the Nabonidus-Marduk dream exchange discussed above; Ishtar's dialogue with Ashurbanipal, relayed via a dream, before the battle of Tell Tuba (see chapter 4). Note Shayegan 2012, chap. 5, for Iranian context.

33. George 1999, 41–46; 2003, 607–13; al-Rawi and George 2014.

34. See F8d* §18 for a sacrifice to the moon (Selene in the Greek). Hdt. 1.131 notes that the Persians sacrifice to the sun, moon, earth, fire, water, and winds. See Boyce 1982, 114–16, for imagery associated with the Mesopotamian moon god Sin and the Zoroastrian moon god Māh under Darius I. Whether Oibaras is to be understood here as engaging in a Mazdaean practice is uncertain.

35. Lions, and to a lesser extent boars (and pigs), appear frequently in Mesopotamian omen literature. Note A. L. Oppenheim's observation (1956, 278n75, with references): "The appearance of the 'key-word' UR.MAḪ ('lion') in the protasis seems to attract a reference to GABA.RI ('rival') in the apodosis"—a phenomenon that may find echo here.

36. For general treatments with bibliography, see Koch 2011; Rochberg 2011.

37. Inscription 48 in Leichty 2011, 107, lines 72–73; see Frahm 2011, 128–218. A Greek example emphasizing individual piety and omens is Xen. *Anab*. 4.3.1–34; see Flower 2012, 133–34, for discussion.

38. For Ashurnasirpal's longest inscription of the type (A.O.101.1), see Grayson 1991, 189–223. For the Esarhaddon quotation, see Leichty 2011, 82, col. i, 25–28. Esarhaddon's quote is modeled on an even earlier exemplar from Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. 1244–1208): see Machinist 2006, 165–66. For DNb, see R. Schmitt 2000b, 33–44; translation follows Kuhrt 2007, 504–5. See Fuchs 2011a for an overview of Assyria at war.

39. Slapping the thigh occurs in a variety of contexts. It appears here to fit a Greek milieu rather than a Near Eastern one, but the act may carry different nuances in different contexts. Cf. Achilles (*Il*. 16.125) in consternation and Enkidu's blessing of Shamhat (*Gilgamesh Epic*, Standard Babylonian Version, tablet vii, line 154) in a context of anticipation or excitement. See references in *CAD* Š/I, s.v. *šapru*, 480; Gruber 1980, 380–83.

40. The name "terebinth" has been associated with various plants. It was used as a food and for its oil in antiquity and is linked by Strabo (15.3.18) and other writers with the earliest days of the Persians under Cyrus. It was perhaps already steeped in nostalgia by Ctesias' time. According to Plutarch (*Art*. 3.2, F17), chewing terebinth was part of the coronation ritual for a new king: see esp. Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1995, 286–92.

41. Stronach 1978, 8; see also Root 2010, 187–88.

42. See Gehlken 2012, 1–6, for an overview of weather omens and their study in Mesopotamian tradition; Matuszak 2012 on lightning omens. I have found no obvious parallels to this episode.

43. One might posit Oibaras as a precursor to Xenophon's sensible and serviceable Adusius (τἄλλα οὐκ ἄφρονα οὐδ' ἀπόλεμον) in the *Cyropaedia*, though Adusius appears only at 7.4.1–7 and 8.6.7. Adusius the soldier relies upon guile and cleverness to reconcile two warring Carian factions and, despite his use of trickery, wins the Carians' admiration. Cyrus later names him satrap of the Carians, at their request. See Gera 1993, 281, with nn. 3–4, and also 175–76 for discussion of commoners in the *Cyropaedia*.

44. The Persian wives provided another boost, castigating the retreating men, displaying their private parts, and asking if the men wished to return from whence they came. Whether this detail was meant to serve as comic relief is unclear. I have yet to find a Near Eastern parallel for the incident, but there is a Greek one in Plutarch's *Sayings of Spartan Women*, no. 4. I thank Esther Eidinow for the reference. This anecdote is related in a number of other excerpts stemming from the *Persica*: e.g., Justin 1.6.13–15 (F8e*, Stronk 2010, 310–11).

45. Grayson 1975, 104–11, and Glassner 2004, 232–39, are the main text editions; Kuhrt 2007, 50–53, contains a translation. For matters of composition and recension, with references to earlier literature, see esp. Zawadzki 2010; Waerzeggers 2012.

46. Hdt. 1.153 alludes to Cyrus' plans to campaign personally against Babylon, Bactria, the Scythians, and the Egyptians. See Waters 2010b, 2011a, on Cyrus' northern and eastern campaigns as related by Ctesias.

47. Cf. F9a and F9c. The latter (Polyaenus 7.6.10) presents the stratagem as Cyrus', and Oibaras is not mentioned. Semiramis employed a similar ruse, using elephant decoys in her war against Strabrobates (see chapter 2). Photius' epitome touches only briefly on Cyrus' campaigns against the Bactrians and Saka, and it is reasonable to wonder if Oibaras had in Ctesias' original as important a role in these campaigns as he did against the Medes and the Lydians. Photius relates Oibaras' suicide subsequent to the description of those campaigns.

48. The account of the campaign suggests a close parallel, in structure and theme, to that of Semiramis against Strabrobates (see chapter 2). Semiramis' and Cyrus' eastern campaigns were linked in later tradition: e.g., Arrian, *Anab*. 6.24.1–3; see Bichler 2014, 59–60, for Alexander's interest in Semiramis.

49. Hdt. 1.214.3 gives a reign of twenty-nine years. Herodotus indicates that he heard several tales of Cyrus' death, and he relates the one he considers most reliable (1.214.5; cf. 1.95). Babylonian documents indicate that Cyrus died in August 530, but the total length of his reign—i.e., including the time before the Babylonian conquest—is not indicated. See Briant 2002, 49–50; Kuhrt 2007, 100n5.

Chapter 4. The Inverted Hero's Many Faces

1. Kent 1953, 142–44. Kuhrt 2007, 491–97, contains a translation of DSf and related inscriptions. See Perrot 2013 for a thorough treatment of Achaemenid-era Susa.

2. Kuhrt 1995, 1:81–89; Liverani 2014, chap. 12.

3. Llewellyn-Jones 2013, 56–61.

4. Compare the description of the array and application of Assyrian forces in an overview of the Assyrian army, Fuchs 2011a, 387, and Radner 2015, 97–98, on the contingents of the Assyrian army. Note Lanfranchi 2011, 211–14, on the Assyrian king's inaccessibility.

5. *CAD* M/II, 1, and note Aster 2012; cf. the Iranian *xvarnah*, on which see Battesti 2011. A parallel may be found in Xenophon's description of Cyrus in all his splendor (*Cyr*. 8.3.14, trans. in Kuhrt 2007, 515–16, and see nn. 12–14). See Lanfranchi 2010, 42, on the

Ctesian motif of fear of the Assyrian king. The glad countenance of those before the king may be connected with the royal splendor—e.g., the appearance of Cyrus in Babylon as described in the Cyrus Cylinder (fig. 10, line 18)—though the word *melammu* is not explicitly used (see Aster 2012, 122n7).

6. *Gilgamesh and Akka*, lines 84–99, in George 1999, 147–48.

7. Edition B, col. v, 15–76, esp. lines 63–72, quoted text from lines 65–66: *a-kul a-ka-lu ši-ti ku-ru-un-nu nin-gu-tu šu-kun nu-'i-id* DINGIR-*u-tu*; Piepkorn 1933, 64–67; Borger 1996, 100–101, 224–25. For this passage and context, see Kuhrt 1995, 2:510–11; Parpola 1997, xlvi–xlvii; Waters 2000, 51–52. The Assyrian king's direct participation on the battlefield was not always a given; see esp. Fuchs 2011a, with several references.

8. See chapter 1 in this volume. Lanfranchi 2011, 214–18, offers a critical discussion of those elements of the worship of Ishtar that may have influenced Ctesias. Teppo 2008 discusses the various types of cult worshippers of Ishtar.

9. See Parpola 1997 for additional examples; one from Esarhaddon's reign (Text no. 2, col. ii, lines 1–15) resonates in a similar context with Ishtar as the king's protector.

10. Kent 1953, 154–55; Kuhrt 2007, 566–67. For the Berossus passage (*FGrH* 680 F11) mandating Anahita's worship in the main satrapal capitals, see Briant 2002, 676–77. See Collon 2007 for imagery of Ishtar, with copious references.

11. See chapter 3 in this volume; Rollinger 2011, 341–43.

12. Arbakes bribed Sparameizes the eunuch with a golden bowl for access to the inner court (see chapter 1, no. 2). Athenaeus 12.528f–29a (F1pα) incorporates an alternative version from Douris of Samos in which Arbakes killed Sardanapalus outright. See Stronk 2010, 163, for commentary. Numerous other fragments refer to Sardanapalus and his fate: see, e.g., Lenfant 2004, 71–77; Stronk 2010, 261–67.

13. ἀνδρείᾳ δὲ καὶ ψυχῆς λαμπρότητι διαφέρων: F1b, Diod. Sic. 2.24.1. The Greek word λαμπρότης conjures up the Akkadian *melammu* (see above).

14. On the name, Babylonian Belshunu, and connections to Xenophon's Belesys, see Stolper 1995, 217.

15. Editions, text, and translation may be found in Grayson 1975, 90–96; Glassner 2004, 218–23; Kuhrt 2007, 30–32 (translation); and note Zawadzki 1988.

16. See Parpola and Watanabe 1988, no. 10, for the text of the loyalty oath; note also pp. xxii, xxxiii. See Borger 1996, 113–17 (Edition B, col. vii, 93–col. viii, 63), for the Arab campaign; Epha'al 1982 on the Arabs during this period.

17. Inter alia: Rollinger 1999; Waters 1999, 2011c; Fuchs 2004.

18. Details are not provided in Diodorus' rendering; one expects that Ctesias' original was more expansive. Arbakes the hero must slay many enemies (Diod. Sic. 2.25.6), just as Cyrus, Megabyzus, and other heroes in the *Persica* do.

19. Manuscripts differ on the spelling of the name: see Lenfant 2004, 60; cf. Stronk 2010, 244–55 (Galameines).

20. Paphlagonia seems an odd choice. Commentators (e.g., Lenfant 2004, 61n267; Nichols 2008, 147) have noted the correspondence of the name Cotta—a *hapax* in

Ctesias—with the Paphlagonian king Cotys, a contemporary of Ctesias. In light of the similar prominence of the eunuch Artoxares (see chapter 1, no. 14), a wider "Paphlagonian connection" may have been traceable in the original *Persica*.

21. Perhaps the mistake is Diodorus'? In Nicolaus' presentation of the dialogue between Arbakes and Belesys (F1pε*), the writer correctly placed Nineveh along the Tigris.

22. Steiner and Nims 1985; Vleeming and Weselius 1985; Frame 1992, chap. 8; Kuhrt 1995, 2:588. Ctesias' Hellenized version is quite different from the extant Aramaic one, which is sympathetic to Ashurbanipal and focuses on a sister's attempt to reconcile the proud and irascible Shamash-shum-ukin with him.

23. Horse omens are a common feature in Persian stories: e.g., they are associated with the hero Oibaras in both Ctesias and Herodotus (3.85–88) (see chapter 3). For the importance of the horse, see discussion and references in Cook 1983, 54–55, 238n20; Dumézil 1984, 144; Balcer 1987, 38, 117; Lenfant 1996, 358–59; and see below.

24. See Kent 1953, 177, s.v. *uvaspa-*, for additional references.

25. See Toher 1989 on the difficulty of reconstructing Nicolaus' original sources; cf. Stronk 2010, 81–83, with additional references. I am less pessimistic about identifying thematic elements (e.g., the horse connections), especially those that appear in several transmitters.

26. Cf. an alternative, conflated version preserved by Agathius, F10β: Stronk 2010, 259, and see also p. 163 for this fragment's inclusion in the *Persica*. Beletaras, a gardener, son of Dercetades, is credited with overthrowing Semiramis' descendants; see Henkelman 2011b, 120–22 and n. 30, for this passage.

27. ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ἔν κρίσει λυπηθέντα (Diod. Sic. 2.33.2).

28. On the name, see R. Schmitt 2006, 266–68, citing Jacoby 1922, 2050.

29. Kuhrt 2007, 504–5. References to the Persian king's superior physical attributes recur throughout the Greek tradition as well; note, e.g., Herodotus' description of Xerxes (7.187.2), the *melammu* manifest; see Aster 2012, 12–18, for comparative perspectives. For the virtuous hero in the court of a foreign king, compare the story of the sage Ahiqar (see Lindenberger 1985, esp. p. 484, for other parallels). The heroes' personalities and experiences are quite different, but their characterization stems from this same motif.

30. Consider Cyrus' origins and, in Herodotus, his antipathy toward "soft lands" (φιλέειν γὰρ ἐκ τῶν μαλακῶν χώρων μαλακοὺς ἄνδρας γίνεσθαι, 9.122.3). For a discussion of the feminization motif applied more globally, see Hall 1989, 157n187, with reference to Said 1978, 225.

31. This was, of course, a widespread motif, applied by the Persians against the Massagetae (Hdt. 1.207–211), Macedonians against Persians (Hdt. 5.18–21), and Cyrus and Oibaras against their pursuers (see chapter 3)—examples are legion.

32. On Μόλιν and Μύλιττα, note Lenfant 2004, 84 (apparatus); Rollinger 2011, 340–41, with references.

33. Note in particular Ziegler 2011 for overview and extensive references. Ziegler suggests (p. 298) that through the early second millennium, the chief musicians may have been eunuchs.

34. While none offers a direct parallel to this story, graphic love poetry is not uncommon in Mesopotamian tradition. Examples may be found in Foster 2005a, 160–69, 678, 944–48, 1000–1002.

35. For the *angaros*, see Lenfant 2004, 86n359. Cf. Xen. *Anab*. 1.6.10 (the assembled Persians grasped Orontas' belt to indicate the death penalty) and Diod. Sic. 17.30.4 (Darius III seized Charidemus' belt for the same purpose); see Briant 2002, 325, for both passages. Note also M. West 1997, 463, for belt-wrestling in the ancient Near East.

36. The choice of Susa is especially odd in the context of Median history, since there is historically no indication that the Medes ever controlled Susa; it is a Ctesian anachronism. Classical Greek texts typically set all royal action at Susa. Parsondes' return (especially with changed appearance) is also a manifestation of the *nostos* motif.

37. CT 53 139, lines 22–26, published in Parpola 1993, 146. See Radner 2011, 363–65, for how different relationships with the king affected modes of address and correspondence.

38. Even a brief perusal of the translations in Oppenheim 1967, and especially the relevant State Archives of Assyria volumes (vols. 1, 5, 10, 13, 15–19, with others forthcoming), will provide myriad and colorful examples.

39. Lenfant 2004, 252n362, for the trap; cf. König 1972, 44.

40. See Rollinger 2011, 324, 333–34 n177, with references, for historical context and Ctesias' Achaemenid-period inspirations.

41. Later references to the Cadusians are few, but they are portrayed as the objects of campaigns led by Darius II (Xen. *Hell*. 2.1.13) and Artaxerxes II (Plut. *Art.* 24.1). If Ctesias' full work expounded upon the tradition that a Persian, Parsondes, became a Cadusian king, no trace of this subject has survived.

42. See the introduction to this volume. For analysis of POxy 2330, note esp. Stronk 2010, 168–71; 2011a; and also Gera 1997, 84–100. The "extraordinarily 'novelistic'" qualities of the tale are the subject of frequent comment, if not analysis; see, e.g., Whitmarsh 2013, 1.

43. Lenfant 2004, 89–90; Stronk 2010, 282–83. See R. Schmitt 2006, 248, on the name. Gera 1997, 89–90, citing Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1985, 466, observes: "Fighting a Scythian queen may have formed part of a conventional Iranian repertory of heroic feats."

44. See Gera 1997, 90–96, for some other important motifs resonant with Greek tradition: strong Scythian women and effete men, Achilles-Penthesilea parallels, and the frequency of taking prisoners in Scythian stories; she notes also (p. 95) that in the Greek renditions, the Persians always lose to the Scythians, while the Greeks always win against the Amazons. Cf. the warrior princess Gordafarid in the *Shahnameh* and her battle with Sohra: Khaleghi-Motlagh 2002.

45. This word and στενάζω are frequently used in Greek tragedies; see Stronk 2011a, 394, for parallels in wording between POxy 2330 and Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Possible parallels—not considered here—may be found in subsequent literary works where love and erotic motivation play a central role: see, e.g., Nelis 2005, esp. 361–63.

46. See inter alia Stephens and Winkler 1995, 24–26; Holzberg 2003; Reardon 2008. Note also Capra 2009, esp. 35–37, for a summary of the similar Abradates-Panthea story in

Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and a comparison of motifs. The issue of Ctesias' influence on Xenophon is of great interest but far beyond the scope of this chapter.

47. Demetrius (F8a) indicates that Stryangaios planned to starve himself to death, which is not implied in the Nicolaus fragment. See Stronk 2011a, 394, for a comparison with Aeschylus' *Persae*.

48. The extant record is conflated (e.g., see Lenfant 2009, 91–92, on Deinon), but only the Ctesian version of the Megabyzus saga, via Photius, is treated here. See Briant 2002, 128–37, on the families of the six co-conspirators, and R. Schmitt 2006, 107–10, on the name "Megabyzus" and the variant "Megabyxus." Balcer 1993, 114–15, deals with the confusion in the sources—though Balcer's treatment does not always facilitate clarity; see also Brown 1987. Note the contemporary (to Ctesias) priest Megabyzus of Ephesus, which may be a title; see Dusinberre 2013, 218, 307n45, with references. Photius notes that Herodotus attributes to Megabyzus' father Zopyrus the same achievements (e.g., the recapture of Babylon during Darius I's reign, 3.153–158) that Ctesias attributes to Megabyzus himself (during Xerxes' reign, F13 §26).

49. See Lenfant 2004, lxxvii, on comparisons between the list of Darius' co-conspirators in DB, Herodotus, and Ctesias. For the historical context, see discussion and references in Briant 2002, 577–78, 973–74; Kuhrt 2007, 325–26, 647–48; Waters 2014, 160–61. The Zopyrus who came to Athens, according to Hdt. 3.160, was this Megabyzus' son. Is Herodotus' Zopyrus connection significant for Ctesias' choice of subject matter? See Bigwood 1976, esp. 15n52, citing Accame 1956, 43f; Jacoby 1922, 2061. Note also Bigwood 1976, 19–21, for the historical problems associated with the Megabyzus saga (especially the revolt of Inaros) and the thematic elements therein.

50. Inconsistent application of Greek titles for Persian officials is not unique to Ctesias and his transmitters.

51. Note the discussion at Bigwood 1976, 3–10.

52. This Apollonides later fell afoul of his masters through his own involvement with Amytis after Megabyzus' death (F14 §44, and see below), another tantalizing hint at how much of the saga is missing.

53. Similar lists of intercessors concerned for Megabyzus or acting on his behalf are noted again at §38, 42, and 43 (see below), suggesting a recurring theme in the original.

54. The name appears to be a variant of "Achaemenes"; on the revolt, see inter alia Bigwood 1976; Briant 2002, 573–77. Megabyzus' success against this rebellion may have been thrown into greater relief by Persia's continuing struggles with Egypt—which was effectively outside its control—for most of Artaxerxes II's reign.

55. Persian and Greek motifs are mixed together in this snippet. The wound to Inaros' thigh recalls Cambyses' actions against the Apis bull and his own death (Hdt. 3.27–29, 3.64), a story with which Ctesias would have been thoroughly familiar, though it is not in the extant *Persica*. F13a (Athenaeus) relays Ctesias' version of the story of Nitetis, the daughter of Apries (different from that in Hdt. 3.1–3), and that is certainly not the only point of overlap. See Ryholt 2013, 72–78, for other iterations of the Inaros cycle.

56. See Stolper 1989, 296–300, for the province "Babylon and Across-the-River."

57. Compare Cyrus' seeking permission from Astyages to depart (see chapter 3), which is necessary for the rebellion to begin. As with Megabyzus, Parsondes relies upon the king for justice. The Ctesian hero is observant of proper form, at least initially, before he tries to overthrow it.

58. On the name, see R. Schmitt 2006, 263–64.

59. This has been suggested by Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 60, among others. The literature on the lion hunt is vast, especially for the Assyrian and Achaemenid kings, and the king slaying a lion was a common symbol in royal iconography, as were portrayals of heroic encounter; see Garrison 1991; Garrison and Root 2001, 54–60.

60. This episode would lead Ctesias' reader to recall Semiramis' use of disguise to travel to Bactria to join Onnes (see chapter 2).

61. R. Schmitt 2000b, 45–46; Kuhrt 2007, 500–501, and see fig. 11.14 for a drawing of the entire relief.

62. Amestris' relentless persistence in avenging the death of her son Achaemenides matches similar acts of cruelty by other queens. When their horrific acts—sensationalized and emphasized in the service of barbarian stereotypes by Ctesias and others—are considered as attempts to defend the stability of the royal line, other perspectives may be applied; see inter alia Bigwood 1976, 20–21, on the thematic parallels with the aftermath of Cunaxa; Brosius 1996, 105–19; Kuhrt 2007, 578 and sec. 12.C, on royal women, with references.

Conclusion

1. Other Persian nobles mentioned by Ctesias were objects of similar treatment by other Greek writers, e.g., Tiribazus in Deinon, on whom see Stevenson 1997, 12–13; Lenfant 2009, 72n3, 182.

2. Old Persian Vidarna; in Ctesias, Idernes. There is more than one prominent Hydarnes in the tradition. Note D. Lewis 1977, 83–84; Briant 2002, 589–90.

3. Such training was essential for Persian men, emphasized, among other places, by Darius in his tomb inscriptions DNa–b; see Kuhrt 2007, 502–5, for translation and notes.

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